



Presents and presence
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Christmas 1944
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Artist Ovide Bighetty
PAGES 12-13

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Resetting the holiday table
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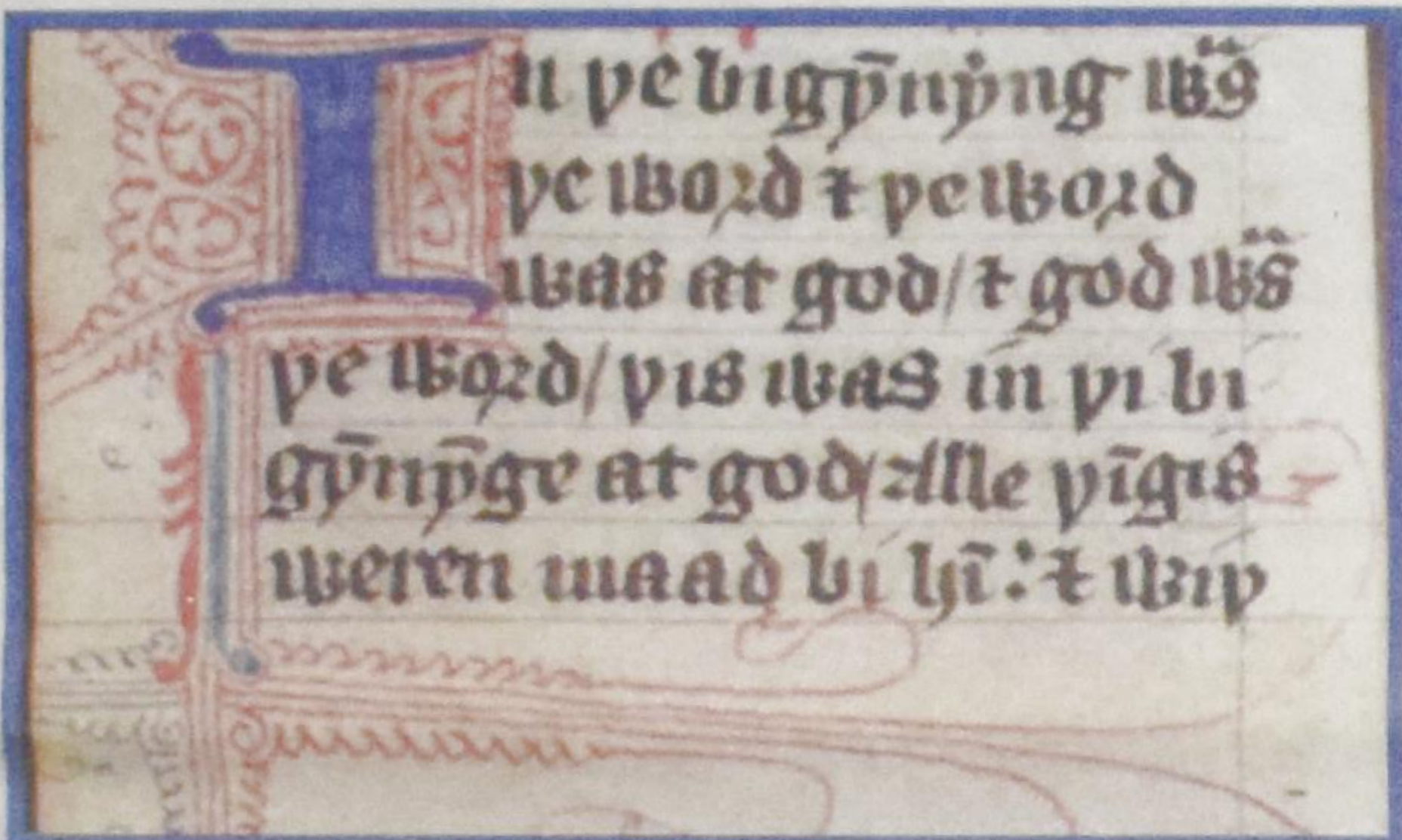
News. Clues. Kingdom views.

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The beginning of the Gospel of John from a 14th century copy of Wycliffe's translation of the Bible into Middle English: "In þe bigynnyng was / þe word & þe word / was at god / & god was / þe word. . ."

What we may be

The following article was originally published in Harper's (June 2011), and is reprinted here by kind permission of the author. It was written on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, for which Harper's asked several prominent poets and novelists to select a passage from the KJV and respond to it. While Robinson doesn't focus on Christmas per se, her meditation seems well-suited for this time of year in which we celebrate the Word made flesh.

Marilynne Robinson

*Behold, I shew you a mystery;
We shall not all sleep, but we shall
all be changed, in a moment,
In the twinkling of an eye, at
the last trump: for the trumpet
shall sound, and the dead shall
be raised incorruptible, and we
shall be changed.*

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

The whole of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is beautiful. But just here there is a rise in the language, a pent joy, a vision under profound restraint, that is like nothing else. "Lo! I tell you a mystery," as the Revised Standard Version has it, "We shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Paul is telling his new converts that, at the end of things, we will be changed from human beings into human beings, from the first Adam to the second Adam — "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." Ophelia says, "Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be." It is the voice of life, disheartened with itself and yearning for more life, for the

Continued on page 2



This painting from the Très Riches Heures, a famous book of hours commissioned by the Duke of Berry around 1410, depicts a medieval Twelfth Night Feast (the celebration of Epiphany, the traditional 12th day of Christmas). Tyndale's translation of the New Testament sought to bring the Gospel to people who were kept outside such feasts, deliberately choosing language that a ploughman could understand.



A Nativity painting from the Très Riches Heures.

News

Reformed kingdom theology

Timothy P. Palmer

The two-kingdom doctrine is Martin Luther's belief in two kingdoms: the kingdom of God, which is the church, and the worldly kingdom, which is the state. As I argued in the first installment of this two article series ("Reformed two-kingdom doctrine?" CC Nov. 28), the two-kingdom doctrine restricts God's kingdom to the church.

The question that should now be asked is whether the two-kingdom doctrine is Reformed? We will consider the views of John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper on this question.

John Calvin held to a modified view of Luther's two-kingdom doctrine. In a few places in the *Institutes*, he uses language close to that of Luther. For Calvin, the kingdom of God is at times the church, although at times it appears broader than the church institute. But Calvin differed radically from Luther's two-kingdom doctrine by teaching the lordship of Christ over the state as well as the church.

For example, Calvin told King Francis I that a true king is one who recognizes himself as a "minister of God in governing his kingdom." Calvin wrote King Edward VI telling him that he should pay homage and submit to the great king, Jesus Christ. Calvin wrote Protector Somerset saying that all the nobility must "submit themselves in uprightness and all humility to this great king, Jesus Christ." Calvin wrote a number of other European monarchs and princes urging them to submit to Jesus Christ in their kingdoms.

This is not the language of the two-kingdom doctrine. While Luther restricted the rule of Christ to the church, Calvin proclaimed the rule of Christ over all of life. So while Calvin tended to see the kingdom of God as the church, he broke with Luther by teaching the kingship of Christ over all of life.

But Abraham Kuyper went beyond Calvin in his view of the lordship of Christ. Kuyper is known for his famous claim that there is not a single square inch of human existence over which Christ does not cry, "Mine!" It is then totally absurd for David VanDrunen's new book *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* to claim that Kuyper fits squarely and comfortably in the two-kingdom tradition (p. 314) and that for Kuyper the kingdom of God is not to be found outside of the church (p. 305). These statements are simply false.

What we may be *continued*

other self or selves we know most intimately in their elusiveness.

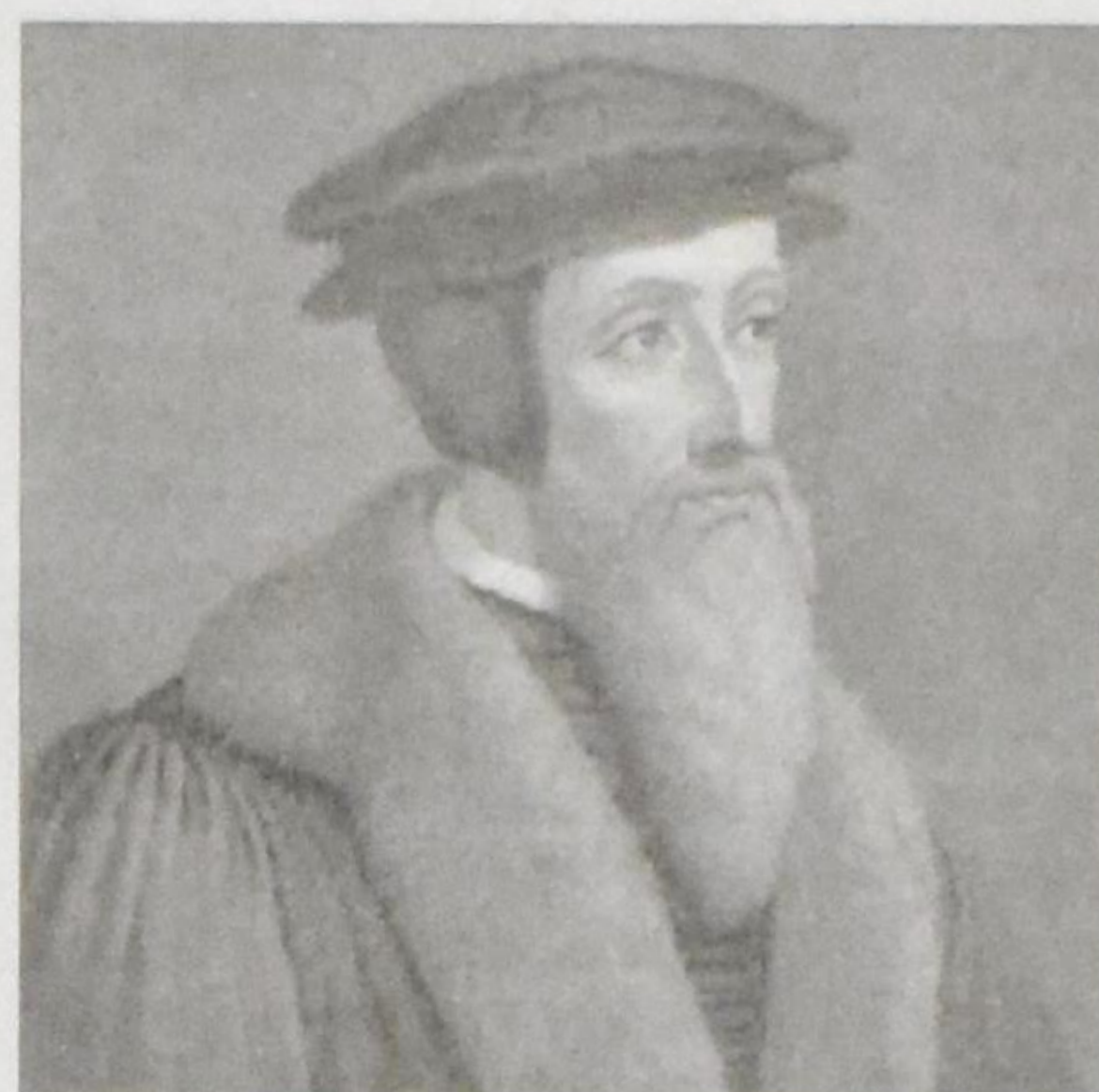
The phrase "in the twinkling of an eye" appears here first in the fourteenth-century translation of the Latin Vulgate made by John Wycliffe and others. Paul wrote in Greek "in the blink of an eye," and Jerome rendered this faithfully as *in ictu oculi*. The Wycliffites took a word from the unaccountably rich vocabulary the ancestors of the English language created to mark subtle differences in the appearance of light, enabling all their generations of descendants to distinguish a glitter, a glimmer, a shimmer. Or the translators simply adopted an idiom. This was the period of Chaucer and Langland, when a robust vernacular literature flourished, taking its pleasures from the vividness and ingenuity of common speech. In Chaucer one finds "hise eyen twynkled" and "a litel shymeryng of a light." So far as I can discover, every major English translation has followed Wycliffe in this detail, including the King James Version of 1611.

This very ingratiating, very human image seems to me to interpret the passage, or to leave a trace of the intention with which Wycliffe and others around him did their work. Wycliffe, an Oxford professor, was burned for his labours. He died a natural death but was exhumed in order to be burned, a fact that speaks tellingly to the potency of the barrier he had breached with his translation. At the time his Bible was first circulating, the great Peasants' Revolt, a failed rebellion against poverty and repression, had just ended, and this no doubt made the populism of the project particularly objectionable to the authorities. And in fact Wycliffe was associated with a movement called Lollardy. The Lollards were preachers, at first Oxford students, who went out under the cover of night to read to the poor in the countryside from the English Bible. They were violently suppressed, yet their movement persisted into the sixteenth century, when it merged with the Reformation.

These days the Bible seems to be used largely to shore up authority, or to legitimize political interests that claim a special fealty to Christianity. The Bible is much thumped and little pondered. So it may not be obvious why people living in the Middle Ages who enjoyed the rare privilege of literacy would have put themselves at terrible risk in order to carry Scripture into the hovels of the poor and defeated. "Gospel" is itself an old English word meaning glad tidings or good news. So perhaps enough of the first meaning still



While Luther restricted the rule of Christ to the church, Calvin proclaimed the rule of Christ over all of life.



Kuyper rejects the view that Christ is the Saviour of just our spiritual life and not the physical life: "The idea that Christ has no significance but as the Lamb of God who died for our sin cannot be maintained by those who read Scripture seriously. . . . Does Christ have significance only for the *spiritual* realm or also for the *natural and visible* domain?" Instead, Christ is our "full redemption."

Kuyper repeatedly claims that the kingdom of God is over all of life: "This kingdom of God embraces all things, visible and invisible . . . *his kingdom is over everything*." In his ministry, Jesus restored this holistic kingdom. "The idea that the action of Jesus in his kingdom was exclusively *spiritual* in nature seems . . . ever more untenable."

In his magisterial *Pro Rege*, Kuyper describes the kingship of Christ over individual believers, the church, the family, society, the state, science and art. The kingdom of God is clearly present in all of these areas. Christ's rule extends over all of life: "To him is given *all power* on earth and in heaven. *All things* are subject to him. Nothing is excluded."

In a separate work, Kuyper states unequivocally: "the Kingdom of God is not in the least limited to the institutional church but rules our entire world-and-life view." This quotation flatly contradicts VanDrunen's assertion of the identity of the kingdom for Kuyper above.

It is astonishing that VanDrunen's erudite work can miss the point so completely. It is clear that his two-kingdom presupposition completely clouds his view of Abraham Kuyper, and probably other Reformed theologians, including Calvin.

For Reformed theology, there is only one kingdom of God that embraces all of life. There is no neutral or autonomous sphere of life outside of God's kingdom. Christ's kingdom is found in all of life. This is true Reformed theology. ➤

(References and further reading are found in my: "Calvin the Transformationist and the Kingship of Christ, *Pro Rege* [March 2007] and "The Two-Kingdom Doctrine," *Pro Rege* [March 2009], available on-line at "Dordt College Pro Rege.")

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clung to it to give Wycliffe's translation of *evangelium* as "gospel" a special power.

"Beholde I shewe a mistery unto you." These are the worlds of William Tyndale, another Oxford scholar, who completed his version of the New Testament in 1526. But he was, he said, making a translation that a ploughman would understand. Much of the celebrated beauty of the King James Bible is owed to Tyndale, and to his imagined readership, the ploughman, whose language he returned to him in this extraordinary, very loving work. Tyndale was burned for his labours.

These are the origins of the Bible in English, the vehemently unauthorized precursors of the Authorized Version of 1611, or the King James Version, as we call it in America. Its greatness is owed in large part to the fact that it has preserved much that is best in the work of its martyrs, including a sense of the urgent generosity that lay behind their words. Imagine a tonsured youth taking a page or two of Scripture from his sleeve and kneeling to read, by some small, furtive light that, since it played on English faces, flickered or gleamed. "We shall all be chaunged, and that in a moment, and the twynklynge of an eye." He'd have been reading to old Adam the delver, the man of earth, the bearer of the primordial curse whose toil was grossly embittered by the impositions of his fellow men. And in the quiet of the peril they shared he'd have brought him the vision of himself as the new Adam, not burdened and coerced by the needs of his hungry body and by the entrapments of his degraded condition, but wholly conformed to himself as a living soul. We know what we are, but we know not what we may be. Anyone who speaks English understands what is meant by the twinkling of an eye, that genial look of inward pleasure that cannot be mistaken and cannot be feigned. It passes even between strangers like a shared secret, a sign of deep human recognition. Lo, I tell you a mystery. ➤

Marilynne Robinson is a novelist and essayist. Among her books are *Gilead*, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2005, and, most recently, *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness From the Modern Myth of the Self*. She teaches at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and lives in Iowa City.



Column

Christ @ Culture



Lloyd Rang

The essence of presents is presence



Right in the middle of Christmas, my six-year old son refused to open any more gifts. "It's too much," he said. "We have to give some of these toys to other kids." Now, you should know this is the same child who has been caught trying to pull

a second set of pants on in the morning because he's forgotten he's already wearing a pair. So Gandhi or Mother Teresa, he is not. He's a pretty normal kid. It's just that he's got a large extended family which loves to spoil him at Christmas – which isn't a bad problem to have, *per se*. But I think many of us can relate to that same sense of fatigue. To that feeling you get when the last piece of shredded wrapping paper has floated to the floor and you're wondering where you're going to find room for all the new stuff.

So, as I thought about "Christmas present fatigue" I figured I'd write an article about shallow consumerism and the true meaning of Christmas. Of course by now you've read that article a dozen times this year – they're about as common as fruitcake and just about as enjoyable – but my editor here at CC was breathing down my neck and I needed to come up with something, fast. That's when I discovered something that blew my mind. I discovered a secret about Christmas that is buried deep in language itself – sitting there, hidden in plain sight – like a clue in a Dan Brown novel.

Have you ever wondered why the words "presentation," "presence" and "present" sound alike, but mean different things? It's because they're actually related. The adjective, verb and noun "present" are all connected to the same word in Latin: *praesense*, which means "to be before something, to be at hand." Over time, that word morphed into another Latin word: *praesens*, which means "being there" or "to bring something before someone." And both words derive from the simple Latin word *esse* – or, "to be" – which is also where the word "essence" comes from.

So, when I bring something to you (when I "present" something) and that thing is a gift (a "present") and do so right now (in the "present") and lay it before you (in your "presence") all of those words are connected to a single idea. They are all words that mean "Here I am. I am here."

This is who I am." When I give something to you, what I am giving you is something of myself. I am giving you my thoughts, my time, my soul, my essence. To put it another way: "the essence of presents is presence."

Unfortunately, not many of us have the time or money to seek out the perfect gift. If you love your wife, you might

very well want to show it by flying to Italy and buying her everything in Versace's window display – but your boss and your paycheque probably have other ideas. Most of us are swamped for time and strapped for cash. We work right up to the holidays. Then, we've got to get the kids to hockey games and tournaments.

And we've got to do all the regular household chores – plus get the place decorated and ready to receive guests. There's just not a lot of time to be thoughtful and not enough money left over to give the perfect gift at Christmas.

So, instead of quality, we go for quantity. If you're like me, at some point, you will find yourself in Zeller's, standing in front of a bin full of DVDs and saying, to yourself: "She likes Johnny Depp, right?" and scooping up an armload of \$6 movies as you push your overloaded cart to the bargain CD bin. We've all been there. And we've all been there because we're all in the same boat. Few of us have time, it seems. Not just at Christmas, but year-round.

As you get older it gets harder and harder to carve out time for friends. To meet up with them for dinner. To see a show. To enjoy each other's friendship. And almost none of us has time to take time for ourselves. To learn how to play a new instrument. To take up a new hobby. To do that thing you've always wanted to do. We're so busy DOING things, we don't have time to BE.

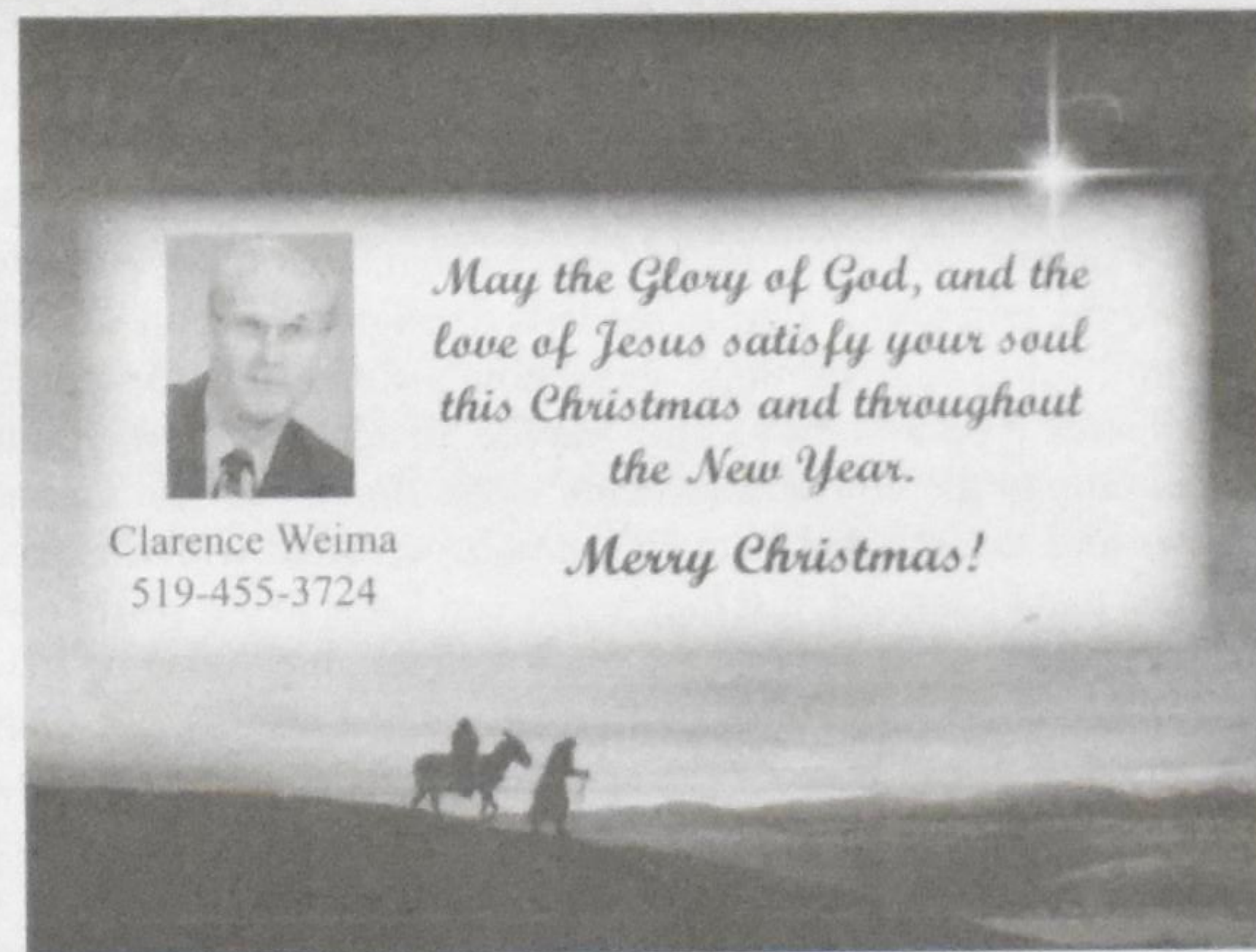
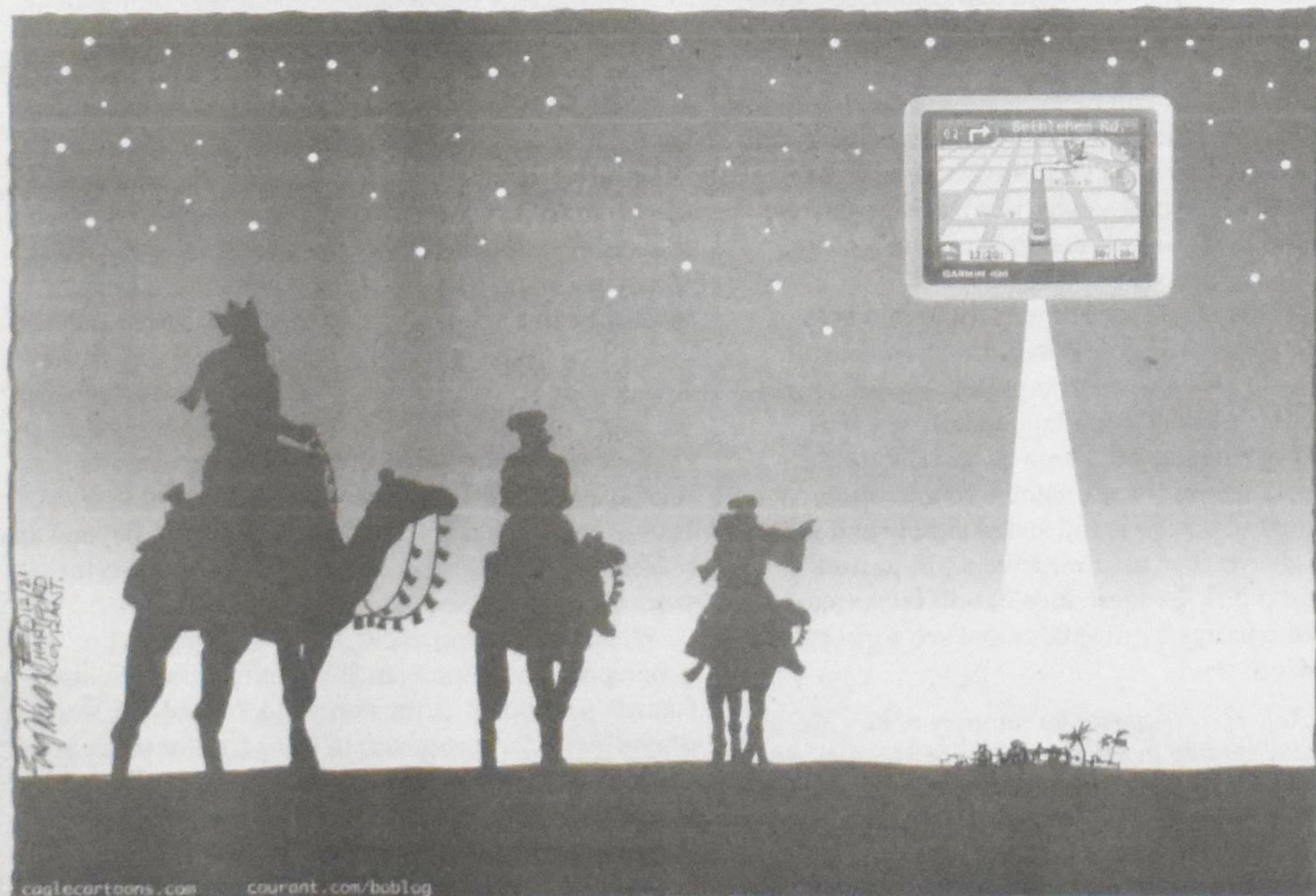
But that's what gifts are supposed to be all about. It's right there, in the word itself. "The essence of presents is presence." God knew this when he gave the world his son. God's present to us, was the presence of his son – his very essence – here on earth. At Christmas, we celebrate the gift of God to mankind. Christmas was when God

said, to the world: "Here I am. I am here. This is who I am." And for 33 years, he walked among us, giving us his time, his life and himself. It is a gift that lasts all of us for all eternity.

There is a lesson in that first Christmas gift for all of us. This Christmas, instead of dashing out the door to buy an armload of \$6 Walmart DVDs made in China... take that moment to reflect, instead. What is it your loved one needs most? That sister of yours who loves music – what about getting her concert tickets for a local band? Maybe it's nothing fancy, but it's a night out in her home-town doing something she loves with people she loves. That friend of yours who has always dreamed of racing cars? There are local racetracks that will let him take his own car on the oval, for a small price. Or even that young employee of yours who works hard and never has time to see her new husband? What about a night at a restaurant and a day off? And wouldn't your son love a night at a baseball game with you? And wouldn't you love to make that memory with him?

Gifts like these may cost a bit more, but they are also invaluable. They force us to slow down and enjoy the precious time we have, here in this life, together. They show those we love how deeply we love them. They are an opportunity to tell others what they mean to us, and how much we want them to be happy. And they are – above all else – the true reflection of that great, first Christmas gift when God came to us and said: "This is how much I love you. I want to be with you. I want you to be filled with joy, every day, and always." Those presents are the essence of His presence, here, in the present.

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) lives in Bowmanville, Ont.



May the Glory of God, and the love of Jesus satisfy your soul this Christmas and throughout the New Year.

Merry Christmas!



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Editorials

What does a pastor look like?



Amanda Bakale

I don't think I'm what people are expecting when they walk through the pastor's office door. I don't wear a suit or the pastor-casual staple of khaki Dockers and a Hawaiian shirt. I don't have a deep voice or a beard or any facial hair for that matter. As a twentysomething short brunette with glasses, people are inclined to assume that I'm the pastor's daughter (or secretary) sitting behind his desk rather than the pastor herself.

When I introduce myself as "Pastor Amanda" strangers either look bewildered or amused. I don't look like a pastor. And so it's no small wonder that I wrestle both with other people's expectations of "pastor" and with my own sense of pastoral identity.

My pastoral care professor at Calvin Seminary drilled into us over and over again that "Everything is data." Everything is data. When someone blows up at you in a council meeting, it's data. Don't take it personally, it's data. When a parishioner absolutely loves you and everything you do, it's data. Don't get a big head 'cause it's data about *them* not you.

"Everything is data" has been a helpful mantra in my life of ministry so far (a *short* life of ministry at this point). When navigating people's expectations, criticisms and assumptions about me in particular and women pastors in general, being able to say "It's all data" is helpful. When I'm sitting with a parishioner – listening to their problems, concerns, praying with them – and then before I leave they make sure to inform me that they really don't "believe in" women in ministry, I remind myself that it's data. It doesn't affect my calling or the affirmation I've received in my vocational path. It's data. About them. Not me.

But my professor's mantra doesn't help in all cases. In one-on-one pastoral encounters and in congregational dynamics, being reminded to take a step back and analyze the situation with a certain amount of distance is a much needed reminder. Yet when I read the *Banner* retrospective on women pastors' experience in the Christian Reformed Church over the last 15 years, I found it was not enough to repeat over and over: "Everything is data. It's not personal. It's just data."

Because the simple truth is that it's more than data about the denomination. The resistance to women as pastors cuts deep – personally and vocationally and spiritually. I'm one of those candidates for ministry described in the *Banner* article who is a year and a half out with no call in sight. Now, thanks be to God, I am in ministry despite not being called yet. I am serving as an interim pastor (unordained) for a congregation in the midst of a pastoral search process. But three months ago I was preparing myself to work part-time as a barista at a local coffee shop while volunteering in my local church, just so I could earn an income and be in ministry at the same time. My situation is not unique. I know too many good women who are a year or more out in candidacy and instead of blessing a congregation with their gifts of preaching and pastoral care and leadership, these called and affirmed women whose heart is to serve God's people through word and sacrament are working everywhere but the church.

Maybe you don't want to read yet another article on women in ministry. Maybe you don't want to hear any more "whining and complaining" about how difficult it is for women in this denomination. Maybe you want to tell me: "Just suck it up and move on." Maybe, in a kinder vein, you would encourage me and others to be patient. Or maybe, like many in the online comments to the *Banner* article mentioned earlier, you would remind me that 1 Timothy 2:12 exists and assume that I haven't read or wrestled with this passage.

But maybe instead, just maybe, we can *listen* to the voices of women waiting for calls. Voices that aren't angry or bitter or demanding but that are filled with longing – longing to serve and minister to God's people through word, water, bread and wine. And voices that are also tinged with lament – lament for the gifts given by the Spirit that go unused by the church. Maybe in response to those voices, we can step back and ask ourselves "What does a pastor look like?"



Which of these people looks like a pastor? Surprise, it's all of them!

Does a pastor look like an older gentleman with a beard and a suit, or maybe a bit more like a suburban pastor with gelled hair, jeans and an untucked shirt? Maybe a pastor can also look like an earnest young woman with glasses, overjoyed to serve and to love and to lead God's people wherever the Spirit is moving.

My hope for this much-needed reframing of what a pastor looks like is rooted in my favourite moment from my first day in the office as interim pastor. My office was full of high school students hanging out before youth group. They all wanted to get a look at the new pastor. One of the high school students came into my office, she stood in front of my desk and stated simply and with absolute conviction: "I'm glad we have a girl pastor!"

For this young girl, for these kids, it will be normal to enter through the pastor's office door and see a girl pastor. Thanks be to God. ✕

Amanda Bakale is a candidate for ministry in the CRC and is currently serving as interim pastor at Maitland River Community Church in Wingham, Ont. She has filled some of her time waiting for a call at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Waterloo, Ontario where she recently earned a MA in Counselling and Spiritual Care.

Christmas in Canada



Michael Buma

The students in my Canadian literature survey course this term had strong reactions to Duncan Campbell Scott's "Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon." It's a poem about singing "Adeste Fideles" ("O Come, All Ye Faithful") while paddling across a moonlit

northern Ontario lake, one of many "sacred hymns of the churches / Chanted first in old-world nooks of the desert" that Europeans brought with them to the new world. Scott's speaker remarks that the "sonorous vowels in the noble Latin / Now are married with the long-drawn Ojibeway," and views this union as a moment of "triumph and courage and comfort," a putatively civilizing light shining in the "Northern midnight / And on the lonely, loon-haunted Nipigon reaches."

As the poem continues, however, the sound of the singing voices seems to be sucked "down into darkness" like the water being churned into little black whirlpools by the paddles. Nature seems to assert itself, to "[stir] with the infinite, tender / Plaint of a bygone age whose soul is eternal," and the Christian hymn is swallowed up and overcome by a pantheistic divinity that is somehow deeper and more primordial. As the poem ends the only sound remaining is nature's own, a hard, driving rain that "breaks and onrushes / Ringing like cymbals."

My students found Scott's poem haunting, even terrifying. Many of them had been canoeing at night and could picture the impenetrable darkness of the opaque water, the eddies from their paddles spiralling down into mysterious oblivion. Most of them don't have much regard for Christianity, at least as they understand it, but they were bothered by the rather sinister sense of human culture being swallowed up by a powerful and seemingly antagonistic natural spirit. For me, a Christian, "Night Hymns on Lake Nipigon" conjures up a sense of foreboding and possibly doubt. But it also raises questions about what it might mean to celebrate Christmas in Canada. "O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem," the hymn tells us, but as Scott's poem points out this seems to be a difficult commute – mental or physical – from the "wild, pellucid Nipigon reaches."

To be clear, I'm not talking about the cultural or spiritual politics of the poem. In the grand scheme of history the Gospel has only recently arrived in Canada's fair domain, and even in this short time we Christians have not always wielded it admirably. Scott himself is a prime example of this: as Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913-32 he presided over the disastrous program of forced assimilation and coercive Christianization that Canadian governments pursued toward Native peoples during this time. These attitudes and policies were embodied most prominently in the Residential School system, which remains responsible for many of the troubles facing Native communities in Canada to this day. None of this, however, means that the Gospel of Christ is inherently incompatible with Native culture, a point I'd suggest is proven beyond any reasonable objection by Ovide Bighetty's powerful artwork in this CC issue.

What I am talking about, then, is setting and geography. The critic Stan Dragland refers to Scott as Canada's first poet of the north and, indeed, the trope of northernness is common in Canadian literature and identity discourse. The Bethlehem we typically picture doesn't experience blizzards or contain black bears, however, and, as Scott points out, this level of distance

Christmas in Canada continued on page 5

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Canada

Editorials

THE LITTLE TOWNS OF BETHLEHEM

For unto us
in Aklavik
is born a child, in
Attiwapiskat
Gaspé
Cornerbrook, Newfoundland.
And a son is given, in
Westaskiwin
Bella Coola
Flin Flon.
And the future of the whole earth
is placed upon the shoulders of the daughter of
Tuktoyaktuk
Tignish
Swan Lake.
And the place of their birth is called
Vermilion
Temiskaming
Nain.
Picture Butte
An angel of the Lord appears in the night sky
over Rankin Inlet, over
Iqaluit, saying
This shall be the sign: you will find the babe
wrapped in cast-off flannel, lying
on a bed of straw, in
Esther, Alberta.
in a winter feeding stall
an open boxcar, outside
Kindersley, Saskatchewan.
And sure, several hours north
from Hogg's Hollow, just this side
Englehart
you see a one, sleeping in its mother's arms
on the soft shoulder, where their car broke down.
And the dark highway shines
imperishable life
while helping them
beneath these northern lights
and driving on, through
Cochrane
Kapuskasing
Hearst
past Nipigon, and on
to the little town of Emo
Rainy River Region,
and least among the little dots
that lie scattered as stars
and litter the map
of Northwest Ontario,
where they're expecting you,
as in so many other
of these least likely dots
this expectation
also is; in
Miniota
Pickle Lake
Ohswekan
Glacé Bay.
For unto us.
For into all
this night
is born a child, this night
bearing each,
and the places of their birth,
and nativity is given
every name.

John Terpstra

Christmas in Canada *continued from page 4*

from our own myths and icons of self-understanding can be alienating. (Of course this distance is temporal and technological too: today's wise men are more likely



Duncan Campbell Scott (centre) traveling by canoe in Northern Ontario on business for the Department of Indian Affairs.

to travel by fuel efficient car than by camel). The challenge Scott's poem proposes, then, has to do with finding a local idiom in which to celebrate Christmas. One powerful answer to this challenge in the Canadian context is a poem I often re-read

around this time of year, John Terpstra's "The Little Towns of Bethlehem" (which is printed on this page by kind permission of the author and Wolsak & Wynn Press).

"The Little Towns of Bethlehem" implicitly takes up the idea that we need to come to Bethlehem to experience Christ's birth. But instead of trying to bridge thousands of miles and at least as much mental space, Terpstra tells us to look for Bethlehem in our own backyard. The poem is obviously very local in its naming of far-flung Canadian hamlets and outposts, and its long lines and diffuse arrangement on the page reflect the vast openness of this country, the sometimes staggering distance between human settlements. Rather than absence or emptiness, however, "The Little Towns of Bethlehem" is defined by presence and pregnant expectation. It's about Christ's humble arrival in the world, wrapped in cloths, wrapped in cast-off flannel, wrapped in the mystery and promise of the incarnation.

Part of this mystery, of course, is the way in which Christ's arrival upends our expectations. Instead of announcing his presence at some marquee gala in Jerusalem or Toronto or Vancouver, Christ shows up in some backwater Judean town, in the far flung outposts of the Canadian hinterland, and, eventually, in the very last place we'd think to look: our flawed and sinful hearts. "For into all / this night / is born a child," Terpstra writes, and we witness the inauguration of a new order for people everywhere, an order in which the last will be first, the weak will be strong, the poor will be rich and the Messiah "will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord . . . and they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace" (Micah 5:4-5; italics mine).

Michael Buma teaches in the English and Kinesiology departments at the University of Western Ontario, and is interim editor of the *Christian Courier*. He loves Christmas traditions, both homegrown and imported.

"The Little Towns of Bethlehem" was originally published in *The Church Not Made With Hands* (Wolsak & Wynn, 1997).

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Letters/Column

Principalities
& Powers

David Koyzis



Social 'rights' and authority



In 1944 U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed a second, economic bill of rights, arguing that the guarantee of political rights in the U.S. Constitution had "proved inadequate to assure us equality in the pursuit of happiness." Among the rights he believed ought to be guaranteed were the "right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation"; the "right of every family to a decent home; the right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health; the right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident and unemployment;" and the "right to a good education." Although nothing came of Roosevelt's proposal in his country, similar rights were enshrined four years later in especially articles 22 through 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which his widow Eleanor played a significant role in developing.

Some Canadians have recommended a similar social charter for their country, and one observer, Senator Noël A. Kinsella, has gone so far as to suggest that there may already be a foundation for one in Section 36 of the Constitution Act, 1982, which commits Canada's governments to seeking equal opportunity, reducing economic disparities and providing public services. The 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation claims to protect, not only the full array of personal liberties found in other bills of rights, but a series of social rights similar to those enumerated by Roosevelt and the UDHR.

The key difficulty with subsuming such issues under the category of rights is that it tells us nothing about who is to provide the goods supposedly guaranteed by them, thereby bypassing the issue of authority which is of more than peripheral importance. This is the same problem we met last month in this space with respect to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is one thing to say that people have a right to a decent home. It is another to indicate which authoritative agent is responsible for providing this and under what conditions.



President Franklin Delano Roosevelt proposed a Second Bill of Rights focused on economic issues.

Positive versus negative rights

If government itself is regarded as the principal authority for the provision of decent housing, it risks overextending its own resources as well as its competence. This difficulty does not arise with respect to negative rights such as freedom of speech, as government is expected simply to refrain from interfering with their exercise, that is, to recognize the limits to its own authority, which it is eminently qualified to do. Positive rights, if they be seen as rights at all, are thus fundamentally different from the negative liberties protected in the US Bill of Rights, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and similar documents, because they call instead for concerted action by multiple authoritative agents. This suggests that the language of rights cannot be stretched indefinitely.

The authority of the state should never be supposed to substitute for that of other institutions when the latter are able to function properly on their own. If the public sector occupies too large a share of a country's resources, and if taxes are maintained at too high a level to support it, other independent initiatives will tend to suffer accordingly. Furthermore, where governments are in the grip of a worldview holding that whatever public funds touch must be secular, that is, "nonreligious," the large public sector will inevitably squeeze out church and para-church ministries undertaking to address the very social ills they may be better equipped than government to deal with. Our society would be spiritually, and not only economically, impoverished if governments were to take over entirely from the Salvation Army, the Jewish Federations of North America, Islamic Relief Worldwide and local church diaconal ministries.

A variety of authoritative agents bear responsibility for bettering the lot of the poor and needy, including government, the pluriform institutions of civil society and, of course, the poor themselves.

David T. Koyzis (dkoyzis@redeemer.ca) is on a sabbatical leave from Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and has recently completed a first draft of his book on authority, office and the image of God.

Christian schools and kingdom commitment

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Bert Witvoet's latest article about Christian education ("Do all in your power, with the help of the Holy Spirit: Christian education in the 60s and today," Oct. 24). He is right: pragmatic thinking is certainly chipping away at the Christian community's commitment to Christian education. But from where I stand, I've noticed that the opposite is also happening. For instance, it's not uncommon for people to send their children to the Christian school for pragmatic reasons. After all, in the Christian school the class sizes are smaller, the teachers want their students to thrive, the moral education is great and the likelihood that their children will get accepted into university is high! In some cases, people send their children to the Christian school even though they have no explicit attachment to a Christian church. So perhaps the problem goes much deeper than pragmatic thinking. Perhaps we are waffling not primarily in our commitment to Christian education, but in our commitment to the Lord and his Kingdom of Life.

Name withheld by request of author

Christian education does make a difference

Although I have always believed for myself that Christian education is beneficial for developing the faith and Christian life of the students (especially through Christian high schools), the Cardus report is a wonderful "proof" that these schools are making a difference in the lives of our young people ("Do Christian schools make a difference?" CC Oct. 24).

For years, I have been trying to tell people of the benefits of Christian Education, and their response is, "Yes, but what about so-and-so? She went to all the Christian Schools, and now look at her." I suppose that everyone can come up with exceptions, children who didn't turn out as expected. In my own family, three of the four children are today strong Christians, supporters of the Church, its missions and Christian Schools.

Peter Baljeu
Windsor, Ont.

COMMENT

Christian schools and teacher firing

John Tamming

What a terrific education issue (CC Oct. 24). It was a delight to read the student reflections on "London High," my alma mater. When I attended, Hank Vandezande brought in Malcolm Muggeridge during a "Christ and Media" week, Hans Overduin conducted as our choir of 250 belted out *Lightshine!* and Wayne Drost held up Goudzwaard and asked our economics class why society insists on monetizing sex and sports. Headly stuff.

Those who are honest will also recall in their own journeys teachers who mailed it in, who (in the words of Redeemer professor Christina Belcher) found that "conformity is easy" and simply "became like their colleagues." In the course of 12 years of schooling, I had poor math instruction for several years and still have trouble adding up my legal accounts (not an inconsiderable deficit, but my clients somehow manage). Looking back, one of my grade school teachers showed every sign of deep clinical depression and should not have been managing classes.

Peter Van Huizen (B.C. Christian Teachers Association) correctly observes that our schools have erred generously on the side of compassion for teachers with performance issues. Compassion for a single person has too often trumped compassion for literally generations of students who must endure ineffectual pedagogy.

However, Van Huizen is wrong to criticize frustrated school boards who insist, after long suffering, on actually doing something about it. In Ontario, the joint OCSTA/OACS mediation manual and most standard employment contracts state that in cases of redundancy (that is, when a school needs to let go of teachers), deference is to be paid to seniority. Indeed, the board is forbidden to look at anything else unless formal discipline is in place. Since formal discipline is next to impossible for conduct unrelated to morals, this effectively means that the board can never look at such factors as classroom effectiveness, the evident joy of a life lived in Christ or enthusiasm for the subject matter at hand.

We claim that our schools are instruments of the Kingdom of God. You would think such rhetoric would make us man the ramparts in the defence of classroom excellence. Instead, we appeal to the virtue of compassion and double down on seniority rights with a fervour that would do any auto union proud.

Steve Jobs, in his last chat with President Obama before he died, urged him to overhaul the U.S. school system. He specifically told him to find ways to fire poor teachers. Good luck with that, Barack. And good luck to the average Christian school board.

As counsel and as a long time board member myself, I have assisted with numerous school staffing issues over the years. I have been thoroughly underwhelmed with how administrators monitor and supervise staff. Personnel files are thin, incoherent and replete with common complaints (from students, parents and others) stretching over years. These deficiencies never amount to grounds for formal discipline but they do suggest an administrator who is keener to get along than anything else.

In such situations I have advised schools to breach the employment contract and terminate the staff member. Unchristian? I don't know why. Since when does sanctity of contract trump the calling of our schools to be centres of Christian excellence?

I offer these modest suggestions. First, overhaul the selection of our principals; select only those with a burning desire to get the kids the best classroom experiences of their lives. Second, use OACS consultants to exercise tight supervision of new principals, in particular their ability and willingness to supervise and recommend the termination of staff. Third, phase out all seniority provisions; if a staff member is let go, offer generous and robust severance, which is more than what 95 percent of us have in the workplace anyways. Fourth, ask the following question of each teacher every three years: Prove to us that you have the work ethic, knowledge base, joy and spark to develop kids into Kingdom citizens. If the board does not like the answer, it may consider its options.

Tough line to take? Perhaps, but most of our schools are shrinking and we might not have the luxury of time. For precisely how long are our consumers going to ante up \$12,000 per year for mediocrity? After all, they can get that down the street for free.

John A. Tamming is a barrister and solicitor in Owen Sound, Ont.



Story

A Christmas to remember

Fritz Vinken was 12 years old in 1944, and was living with his mother in a small house near the German-Belgian border. On Christmas Eve three American soldiers knocked on their door, and were followed a little while later by four German soldiers who also wanted to come in out of the cold. What happened next is explained in the following story, which was written 67 years later.

Fritz Vinken

(translated by **James Kooistra**)

When somebody knocked on the door that Christmas evening, Mom and I had no idea of the miracle that awaited us. I was 12 years old then and we lived in a very small house near the German-Belgian border. Dad had sent us there when our town of Aachen suffered more and more from air raids. He was working for the air protection service.

When we heard another knock on the door, mom quickly blew out the candles. Then she went ahead of me to the door and opened it. Outside stood two men with steel helmets on, in front of the snow-covered trees. Mom realized before I did that they were American soldiers. Enemies! Mom stood there, hand on my shoulder, without saying a word, unable to even move.

One of the soldiers spoke to Mom in a language we did not understand, then pointed to a third person who was laying in the snow. The men were armed and they could have forced entry into our house, but they did not so much as move and only asked with their eyes. The wounded man appeared more dead than alive. "Come in," Mom finally said. The soldiers carried their comrade into the house and placed him on my bed. Not one of them spoke a word of German. Mom tried French and one of the men was able to make himself understood in that language.

The broad, short, dark-haired soldier was called Jim. His friend, tall and lanky, was Robin. Harry, the wounded soldier, was lying on my bed. He was as white as a sheet. They had lost contact with their army unit and had already been roaming through the woods for three days, looking for Americans while being very alert of the Germans.

They were unshaven and unkempt, but looked like big boys in their heavy army coats.

That's how Mom treated them too. "Quickly get Hermann," Mom told me, "and bring potatoes along as well."

That brought a very big change in our Christmas program. Hermann was the name of our well-fed, fattened rooster, which we had in the house already for weeks. While Jim and I helped in the kitchen, Robin cared for Harry, who had been shot in his leg and almost died from loss of blood. Mom tore a sheet in pieces to cover the wound. It did not take long before the tempting smell of the fried rooster could be smelled throughout the kitchen. I was just setting the table, when there was another knock on the door. Thinking there might be more lost Americans, I right away opened the door. Outside stood four persons also in uniform, but they were German soldiers.

I stood there as if in shock. In spite of my young age, I knew the warning: "Whoever shelters enemy soldiers, is a traitor." Mom was scared, her face was pale, but she stepped outside and said very calmly: "Merry Christmas!"

The soldiers wished her the same. "We have lost our army-unit. We would like to wait here until daybreak," declared the leader, an under-officer. "Can we stay with you?"

"Of course," Mom answered with calmness but in fear. "You can have a good warm meal and join us as long there is some food."

"But," Mom continued, "we have three more guests, whom you probably don't consider friends!" Her voice suddenly became sharp, such as I had never heard before. "It's Christmas Eve and we are not going to fight here!"

"Who are they?" the under-officer asked. "Americans?"

Mom looked each of the four men straight in their cold faces. "Listen," she said, "you could be my sons and those inside also. One of them is a wounded soldier and he is fighting for his life. And his two comrades are lost, hungry and tired, just like you are. In this night," she now addressed the under-officer with a pitched voice, "on this Christmas Eve there is not going to be a war fought."

The under-officer stared at her. "We have talked long enough now," Mom said and clapped her hands. "Put your weapons right there on that crate and do it quickly. Otherwise we will eat the whole meal."

The four soldiers put their weapons on the cedar box in the hall: two pistols, three stenguns, a light MG and two hand-grenades. In the meantime, Mom quickly spoke with Jim in French. He said a few words in English and I saw in amazement that the Americans also gave their weapons to Mom.

When the Germans and the Americans were standing shoulder to shoulder in our small kitchen, Mom was really in her element. Smiling, she found for each of them a place to sit. We had only three chairs, but mom's bed was big enough to sit on. Beside Jim and Robin she placed the two who entered last. After that, without letting the tense atmosphere bother her, she went back to cooking.

But Hermann did not get bigger, and we had four more persons to feed. "Quickly," Mom whispered to me, "get me a few more potatoes and some oat flakes. The boys are starving and when one's stomach growls a person gets antsy and angry."

While I plundered the supply room, I heard Harry groaning. When I got back in the room, one of the Germans had put his glasses on and bent over the wounded American. "Are you a medical-soldier?" Mom asked.

"No," he answered, "but I studied medicine for a couple of months in Heidelberg. Then he explained to the American soldier, in fluent English, that the wound of Harry had not been infected due to the cold weather. "He only lost a lot of blood," he said to my Mom. "All he needs is rest and good food."

The tension eased. I found the soldiers, as they sat there together, rather young. The officer who was 23 was the oldest. He pulled a bottle of red wine out of his breadbox and Heinz found half a loaf of brown bread, which Mom cut into slices.

They were told to sit around the table for their meal. Mom kept part of the wine back for the injured soldier. Then she mentioned that she would say a prayer and asked out loud for a blessing. I noticed that she had tears in her eyes, when she spoke the well-known words: "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest. . . ."

And when I looked around, I noticed that the eyes of several of these weary soldiers were wet from tears. They were just young boys, those from America as well as and those from Germany, all of them far away from home. Close to midnight mom went to the door and asked us to follow her outside and to look at the star of Bethlehem. Without Harry, who was sound asleep, we all stood



Three American and four German soldiers found warmth, rest and peace with Fritz Vinken and his mother on Christmas Eve 1944.

beside her and for all of us this was a moment of silence when we saw Sirius, the brightest star in the sky. At that moment the war was far away and almost forgotten.

Our private truce lasted till the early hours in the morning. Wounded Harry looked a lot better at the start of a new day. With two poles and mom's best tablecloth they made a stretcher. The German under-officer showed the Americans, who were looking at Jim's map, how they could find their troops again. He pointed at a creek. The medical-soldier translated every word into English.

"Why not to Monschau?" Jim asked.

"For God's sake, don't go there!" cried the German officer. "We have just taken Monschau again after heavy fighting."

Mom gave each soldier his weapons again. "Be careful, boys," she said. "I wish and hope that all of you will return to the place where you belong. That God may protect all of you."

The Germans and the Americans shook hands. We followed them with our eyes till they, going in opposite directions, disappeared from our view. When we went inside again, Mom took the old family Bible. She opened it at the story of the birth of a baby in a manger and of the Three Wise Men, who came from afar to present their gifts. Her finger followed the lines: "and they took a different route to return to their country."

[In 1966 Fritz Vinken found, after a long search, two of the American soldiers: Ralph and Jim. Of the German soldiers he was unable to locate anyone].

News

Dutch Christian civil servant fired for opposing gay marriage

THE HAGUE, The Netherlands (BosNewsLife) – A Christian civil servant was fired in November by the Dutch city of The Hague for refusing, on biblical grounds, to oversee same-sex marriages.

Wim Pijl, says that he will take legal action against the dismissal, despite parliamentary support for gay weddings.

“For me this is a personal case,” explained Pijl. He also told reporters that God opposes same-sex marriages. “As a Christian I learned from the Bible that there is only one marriage, between a man and a woman.”

The Hague city government said through a spokesperson that it had no other choice than to dismiss Pijl, as he had “refused to take back his remarks.” Additionally, on November 15 the Dutch parliament effectively sealed his dismissal when most legislators voted for a law proposal that would force officials overseeing marriages to officiate at gay weddings.



The motion was tabled by the left-leaning opposition GroenLinks, or “Green Left” party. The ruling People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) opposed the move, but failed to get a parliamentary majority.

“I am intensely sad and very disappointed about this decision,” said Pijl. He is now among 104 Dutch civil servants who refuse to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies, according to the Dutch gay rights group COC.

“I can not discriminate [against] gay couples, but I am discriminated against because of my views,” Pijl said. “I will seriously look into possible legal action against the dismissal.” He is also a former city councilor of a Christian faction.

Pijl is supported in his case by the RMU trade union which said it was “shocked” about the situation.

In 2001, The Netherlands became the world's first country to legalize gay “marriage.”

Catholic leaders happy with new Mass translation

VATICAN CITY, Rome (CNA/EWTN News) – English-speaking Catholic parishes in the U.S. and Canada began using a new translation of the Mass on the first Sunday of Advent. Many Catholic leaders are happy with the changes and are predicting great gains for the church.

“I have a feeling that this will be a great moment for deepening people's liturgical piety and liturgical spirituality,” said Cardinal Raymond Burke, a member of the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship. “The prayers are much more beautiful and they carry with them a staying power,” said the cardinal.

Burke predicted that the newly-rendered prayers “would get people thinking about what they prayed, and taking consolation from it, and also inspiration” – and he says that is already happening.

The Rome-based cardinal offered Mass in early November with the new texts on a recent visit to England, where many dioceses made the switch earlier than in North America. “I have to say the texts are really much, much richer and much more beautiful,” concluded the cardinal, who described the previous translation as “often very bland and stripped of any richness.”

‘Awesome, poetic, reverent’

John Paul II had promulgated a new missal translation that would be a more faithful English translation of the

Mass, including faithful to the texts taken directly from the Bible. The previous version had drawn criticism for its looser adaptation of the original Latin.

New York Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan calls the new translation “awesome, poetic, reverent language.” Dolan pointed out that the new texts spoken by the laity have changed less than those prayed by the priest. “I found myself, personally, having to understandably go more slowly at Mass because I was having to look more closely at the text,” he recalled, “and that's no bad thing.” The result is “praying with more reverence and intention and awe,” he says. The new language is “richer and stronger than what we have grown up with.”

There has been no hostility to the changes from lay Catholics, who are said to be “just getting on with it,” though the new texts are “a different idiom,” according to Australian Archbishop Mark Coleridge, chairperson of the committee that prepared the new English lectionary.

Changes for the laity include the reply “and with your spirit” spoken to the priest, rather than the response “and also with you.” Elsewhere, the threefold “*mea culpa*” (“my fault/sin”) was returned to the Penitential Rite. The profession of the Nicene Creed begins with “I believe” instead of “we believe” – a direct translation of the Latin “*credo*,” and also mirroring the historic wording of the Apostles Creed.

Scholar probes links between Thomism and environmentalism

ST. PAUL, Minn. (CWN) – In a newly published interview, Christopher Thompson explores the links between Thomism, respect for the created order, and agriculture. Thomism is the philosophy based on the the thinking and teachings of the 13th-century church father Thomas Aquinas.

“For centuries the Church advanced a philosophy of creation in which each creature was considered as a living whole, an ordered whole, which also served a broader purpose beyond itself,” said Thompson, the academic dean of the archdiocesan seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. “In many ways, I think one can consider the rise of ‘environmental awareness’ as simply the retrieval of this outlook on life. Nature is not a machine and creatures are not mere parts. They are, as Thomas would have said (and the Roman Catholic Catechism does still say), formally and

finally ordered wholes – created by God for the purposes of his glory. They ought to be treated as such.”

“The [Roman Catholic] Church has a long tradition, going back decades, which speaks about the importance of agriculture, especially its dignity,” he continued. “The farmer was seen to cooperate with God's creative order, as a husband and steward of the earth's resources. Animals were not mere things, and a farm was anything but a ‘factory.’ Instead, the farm was the ideal place to engage in the original vocation of the human person – to till and to keep the earth. The family farm, the Church argued, was the ideal circumstance in which to raise the next generation, because it united men and women, children and the aged, in the common and noble task of drawing forth the fruits of the earth for the good of man and the glory of God.”

“A unified theological and philosophical vision provided

CRC commissions volunteer missionaries

BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – Nearly 20 people were commissioned last month to serve as volunteer mission workers for either Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM), the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) or partner ministries with ServiceLink, the office that helps to recruit and train volunteers for the Christian Reformed Church.

The commissioning service capped an orientation that took place in Burlington at the Canadian office of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

“These orientation workshops are a collaborative effort with CRWRC, CRWM and ServiceLink – including the planning team as well as workshop leaders,” says Carol Sybenga, program manager of ServiceLink. “We also like to include former volunteers who have served with our agencies and who can share first-hand experiences with orientation participants.”

One of the “breakout sessions,” in fact, joined volunteers with people who have served in missions in the countries where the volunteers will be going.



The volunteer mission workers will be serving in diverse countries in all corners of the world. For instance, a family of five will be serving orphans in Kenya and engaging in agriculture, tutoring and vocational training projects, and providing love and support to more than 200 children.

Another volunteer will serve as a CRWRC International Relief Manager in Pakistan. A retired couple will travel to Bolivia to work with a veterinarian ministry. A number of mission team leaders were on hand, as well, preparing for future trips to Nicaragua and Japan. In Nicaragua teams will assist various community development projects, whereas in Japan they will be involved in earthquake/tsunami relief work.

“There are also those who are looking to develop long-term partnerships with an overseas community – to learn from each other and to share various gifts and skills,” said Carol Sybenga.

Two volunteers who work in the Burlington office also participated in the orientation. They have served abroad and wanted to learn more about serving with the CRC outside of North America. “There were also a few people from the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund who were here to collaborate with us and preparing to lead teams in the future,” Sybenga noted.

the context for an engagement in rural evangelization,” Thompson added. “Now, needless to say, things are quite different. In fact, perhaps the most important statistic to keep in mind concerning the present state of affairs is simply this: of the 244 Catholic institutions of higher learning in the United States, not one offers a program of study in agriculture.”

News

U.S. study shows megachurches young, white, still growing

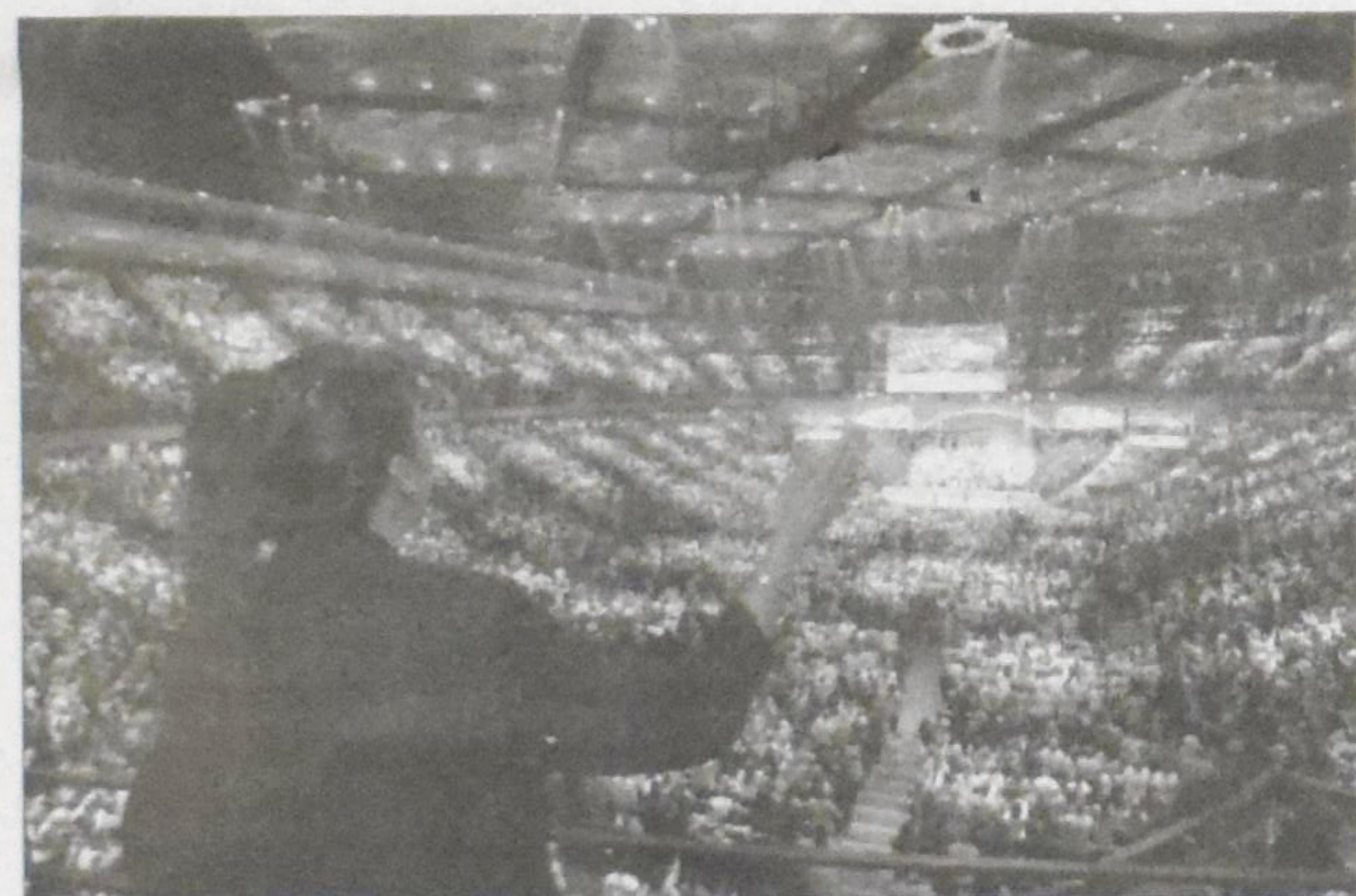
HARTFORD, Conn. (TCP)—If mega-churches were a denomination they'd be the second largest Protestant group in the U.S., researchers say.

The information comes from the Leadership Network and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. Research by the two groups reveals that the largest American churches (2,000 or more attendants) draw nearly six million worshipers in a weekend. The findings are in a report titled "A New Decade of Megachurches: 2011 Profile of Large Attendance Churches in the United States."

According to the study released in late November, while 15 percent of megachurches did not grow or were in decline over the past five years, the stated average attendance for megachurches grew from 3,597 in 2010 from 2,604 in 2005. Growth, the researchers concluded, continues to be steady for these largest of churches.

"Megachurches" the study's authors say, "remain one of the most robust religious organizational expressions within North America."

Notably, these churches believe they're spiritually strong despite what critics say. In fact, 98 percent of members agree that their congregations are "spiritually alive and vital" and that they have strong beliefs and values. A majority also say they have a clear mission and purpose.



Another finding debunks popular perceptions about lack of oversight and accountability of members. According to the study, most megachurches do, in fact, place a strong emphasis on personal accountability and Christian spiritual practices among attendees.

At least three-quarters of megachurches say they promote "quite a bit" or "a lot" of the practices of personal Bible study, prayer or devotions, talking with children about faith and stressing abstinence from premarital sex. Sixteen percent also emphasize fasting and 13 percent stress observing the Sabbath.

Providing cups of cold water

Other emphases in megachurches include youth activities, community service, cash assistance, financial counseling and food pantries. Less than half of the surveyed churches stress voter education/registration.

Providing a glimpse of the attendees, the study reveals that 70 percent of participants are under

the age of 50; and 82 percent of the surveyed churches have a majority Caucasian participation. Forty percent of regular adult participants were new to their congregation in the last five years and only 20 percent were identified as life-long members of the congregation.

Other characteristics of megachurches:

- * Half are multi-site;
- * Nearly half (48 percent) have one or more Saturday night-services (in addition to Sunday services);
- * 71 percent identify as evangelical; eight percent say they're Pentecostal;
- * 70 percent say their church is part of a denomination, network, fellowship or association of churches;
- * 79 percent say the church's most dramatic growth occurred during the tenure of the current senior pastor;
- * 88 percent say their church/pastoral leadership uses Facebook or other social media regularly;
- * A quarter of megachurches were founded in 1949 or earlier;
- * Nearly all megachurches use drums, percussion, electric guitar and visual projection in their worship, but only 43 percent use a choir;
- * 94 percent describe their worship services as joyful; 46 percent say their services are reverent.

The five largest churches in the U.S. are Lakewood Church, Houston (Joel Osteen); Life Church, Edmond, Okla. (Craig Groeschel); Fellowship Church, Grapevine, Texas (Ed Young, Jr.); Willowcreek Community Church, Barrington, Ill. (Bill Hybels); and North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, Ga. (Andy Stanley).

Data is based on a survey of 336 churches with attendance of 1,800

and up; 304 of the respondents represented churches having attendance of 2,000 or more. The report was authored by Warren Bird and Scott Thumma.

Canada has not escaped the megachurch phenomenon, though the country's 10 largest churches are proportionately smaller and fewer of them. While there is no up-to-date study of these Canadian churches, slightly earlier data shows them to be not unlike their American counterparts in many respects. According to 2009 information from christianity.ca, Canada's largest churches (not listed in order of size are: Centre Street Church and First Alliance Church, both in Calgary; Sherwood Park Alliance Church, Sherwood Park, Alta.; Christian Life Assembly, Langley, B.C.; The Meeting House, Oakville, Ont.; Metropolitan Bible Church, Ottawa; The Peoples Church and Queensway Cathedral, Toronto; The Rock Church, Lower Sackville, N.S.; Springs Church, Winnipeg. ➤

Excavations reveal Herod didn't complete Jerusalem's Western Wall

JERUSALEM (Haaretz) — Recent archaeological excavations in Jerusalem show that, contrary to popular understanding, King Herod was not solely responsible for constructing the Western Wall.

Israel's Antiques Authority announced recently that the discovery of a *mikveh* (ritual

bath) alongside Jerusalem's ancient drainage channel challenges the conventional archaeological perception that Herod built the wall in its entirety, saying it is now evident that construction was completed at least 20 years after Herod's death (believed to be in 4 B.C.).

The excavations, directed by IAA archaeologist Eli Shukron with assistance from Professor Ronny Reich of the University of Haifa, revealed three clay oil lamps of a type that was common in the first century A.D., as well as 17 identifiable bronze coins. The clay oil lamps and bronze coins were found when archeologists sifted through soil removed from inside the sealed *mikveh*.



According to Dr. Donald Ariel, curator of the IAA numismatic collection, the latest four coins were struck by the Roman procurator of Judea, Valerius Gratus, sometime around AD 17 or 18 — about 20 years after Herod's death.

"This bit of archaeological information illustrates the fact that the construction of the Temple

Mount walls and Robinson's Arch was an enormous project that lasted decades and was not completed during Herod's lifetime," said the IAA, adding that the find confirms descriptions by the Jewish historian Josephus, which state that it was only during the reign of King Agrippa II (Herod's great-grandson) that the work was finished." ➤

Pakistan rescinds ban on texting 'Jesus Christ'

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AsiaNews) — The government of Pakistan has decided to withdraw the name of Jesus Christ from a list of censored words it had drawn up, a "black list" of 1600 words of an obscene, pornographic or religious reference that cannot be used in phone text messages. That change of mind came about through the commitment of the Special Advisor for Religious Minorities, Paul Bhatti, coupled with the demonstrations of parliamentarians and activists of the All Pakistan Minority Alliance (APMA).

During the protest, among gestures judged "extreme" (but always peaceful and in compliance with the law) was that of an elected official from the province of Sindh Ampa. Saleem Khokhar sat on the floor during the Assembly meeting at which members decided to include the name of Christ on the black list. His empty chair, he said, would be occupied again only after deletion of Christ's name from the list of banned words.

Interviewed by AsiaNews, Paul Bhatti, brother of Catholic minister for religious minorities Shahbaz Bhatti who was assassinated on March 2 this year, confirmed the push for the "rehabilitation" of the name of Jesus. A letter sent on Nov. 14 had ordered telephone operators to install a communications software program that would block forbidden words in Urdu and English, among them "naked, gay and Jesus Christ."

The black-list story captured the attention of international media before the Pakistani government finally ended the controversy, restoring legitimacy to the rights of Christians. ➤

Features

Just trying to help: Exploring the complexities of doing good

Will Braun

My parents packed me, my sister and a Christmas hamper into the car. We were headed to an address provided by the local Cheer Board. The plan was for us to all go in for a short visit. I imagine the Cheer Board encouraged this to humanize the helping. Predictably, our venture took us to the run-down side of our Mennonite prairie town. I remember feeling less than enthusiastic, but I suppose I felt we were doing something necessary, something good. What I, as a boy of about 10, had not supposed, however, was that inside the homely little stucco house I would find my classmate Abe.

I don't remember much of the visit except the drab house – the kind in which you sit down gingerly – and the dreadful awkwardness. I still cringe. I knew on some level that Abe would have gladly passed up the toys, turkey and Christmas oranges to avoid having his inferior social status so vividly exposed. At school he could try to fit in, but with me standing in his house he could not pretend. I felt shame for having shone a light on our differences. I suppose it was the same shame he felt, just from the other side.

I don't recall the first day back at school after Christmas, but I'm sure Abe didn't run up to me gushing with appreciation. I don't know what happened to him. He may have moved back to the Mennonite colonies in Mexico. On a prior Christmas, our family delivered a hamper to another home. That time, the father didn't even emerge from the back room to greet us, and the teenage daughter refused to acknowledge the gift we brought her. The mother was left to manage the embarrassment. I don't actually remember that visit, but my dad mentions it on occasion. For him, the star of the story was the young woman: her refusal of our gift was not so much rude as respectable. She was clinging to dignity. He says he would like to meet her now. I think he imagines she has done well for herself, that she carries herself well and possesses a lively wit.

Other families undoubtedly have heartwarming hamper stories, but not us. Those two cheerless encounters were enough. Our subsequent helping took different forms. It



The need for programs like *Out of the Cold* continues to grow.

was a disturbing track record. How could our good intentions have fallen so flat? After all, we were just trying to help.

'The sin in altruism'

Anyone who has worked in social services, international development or pastoral care knows that helping is complicated. Good intentions are not enough. But stories about sour recipients and uneasy encounters don't make it into Cheer Board annual reports or promotional videos of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We – by which I mean North American Christians who are in a position to help – don't often hear about the overseas partner who pockets the money we put in the offering bag; the prison inmate who requests a visitor, but later backs out, preferring uninterrupted incarceration to a chat with a well-meaning volunteer; or the underprivileged teenager who rebuffs all offers of help in favour of gang treachery. Nor do we hear of the volunteers who burn out, exasperated by the apathy or opportunism of those they have tried to help.

The stories we hear are the success stories of people who make good use of the money we donate and smile with gratitude when cameras appear. These stories deserve to be told. But so do the others.

The messy stories do not diminish the necessity of helping – we are called to help – but they acknowledge that helping is hard. To tell such stories is to be honest with ourselves and those we seek to help. Hopefully, that honesty leads to learning.

One factor that makes helping complicated is the mix of human motives.

"We may help simply because we want to feel good about ourselves," writes Garret Keizer in his book *Help: The Original Human Dilemma*. Keizer is a former teacher,

small-town minister and social worker. He has tried to help many people. And although the above quote may sound jaded, Keizer is not an armchair critic whose helpful idealism has frosted over with clever cynicism (although he names that danger). Rather, his book probes ways in which good intentions get tangled. Or, as he puts it, the book is about "locating the sin in altruism."

Unless we claim 100 percent purity of motive, our good intentions will be tainted at least slightly, usually with some form of selfishness. Our impulse to help may be of God, but that does not make our altruism spotless.

Part of me helps because I like a pat on the back. I like to be seen as a good person, and I like to see myself as a good person. When I cut a cheque for a charity, I feel noble. That's not all bad, but I can clearly detect the creeping danger of feeding my ego on my own perceived goodness. To admit mixed motives is not to negate the value of my efforts or the good part of my intentions. Rather, it is to chip away at the sin of pride in my altruism. It is the hard work of humility.

Promotional materials aimed at prospective helpers often say: "You can make a difference!" I find this cliché less useful than a quote I saw on a bookmark at a spiritual retreat centre years ago: "Are you choosing out of the resources of Christ's life in you to recover from the need to make a difference?"

This is not to say we shouldn't seek change in the world, but rather that when we feel a need to say, "That wouldn't have happened without me," something is askew. If our motivation for helping is that we can make a difference, then helping is about our ego needs, rather than serving others. I don't think Jesus healed the sick and fed the hungry so he could pat himself on the back and say, "I made a difference."

Keizer says our objective should not be an "enhanced sense of our own potency." The needs of the world are not an occasion for us to feel important and empowered, nor are they an occasion to have our name on a plaque or in a public list of donors.

There is a place for potency and competence in addressing poverty, but rather than highlighting our own effect, we should contemplate the humility that Catholic monk Thomas Merton writes of in his book *New Seeds of Contemplation*. Paraphrased for inclusivity, Merton states, "When humility delivers us from attachment to our own works and our own reputation, we discover that perfect joy is possible only when we have completely forgotten ourselves." If we are not humble, we will unconsciously tend to "be virtuous not because we love God's will, but because we want to admire our own virtues."

'I package it. You buy it.'

Stephanie Tombari says aid agencies sometimes pander to lesser motives. She used to be a senior writer for the Christian Reformed Church's international aid organization. In a 2009 *Geez* magazine article about her work, she candidly describes a "McMarketing" approach in which a "target market" is given calculated, selective information about the poor. "I package it. You buy it," she writes. "I send you another picture for your fridge that reminds you how good you are."

"Do you want to know what's up with poverty," she asks the donor, "or do you want to keep it simple and send a goat?"

Her critique underscores the need for us to examine our motives. Like Keizer and Merton, her words imply we should think carefully about the essence of helping.

"The central paradox of helping the poor," says Keizer, "is that our most humane gestures on their behalf serve to accentuate their dehumanization."

Overcoming differences

Ideally, helping should overcome differences between people. It should humble helpers and empower the helped. It should nurture equality and unity. If helping is rewarding – as is often said – the reward ought to be a discovery of our own inner poverty and a oneness of all humanity in God. But to the extent that we help "in order to certify our own righteousness," as Keizer puts it, we do the opposite: We isolate ourselves behind walls of pride.

On this point, helping becomes even more complicated. Although we want our help to overcome differences, it necessar-



Heartwarming hamper?

Features

ily creates difference between people. It separates people, at least momentarily, into helpers and those helped – groups that are not equal.

In some cases, the difference between helper and helped is negligible. Imagine neighbours who semi-routinely shovel each other's walkways. But usually the difference is obvious. The young woman who refused our family's Christmas gift seemed to react to that difference. I think she resisted being cast in a lower position. She knew, as Jesus said, that it is more blessed to give than to receive.



Jesus' intent was probably not to say that being on the receiving end of charity can sting, but nonetheless, it is too easy to bask in the blessedness of our own generosity without recognizing that receiving can be difficult.

"The central paradox of helping the poor," says Keizer, "is that our most humane gestures on their behalf serve to accentuate their dehumanization." Even if our intent is to enable disadvantaged people to attain a position in life from which they, too, can help others, just by reaching out to help we are highlighting the fact that they are not there yet. The reach is always a reach downward. The message is that they are mere recipients, the less blessed. The message is that if they have any hope of climbing out of that hole, they need to swallow their pride, smile and say thanks. Some people seem happy to do this. Others do not.

An awkward privilege

To help is a privilege. Just ask someone who is poor, severely disabled or too old to help. Ask someone who is the recipient of help many times a day, but rarely has an opportunity to help others.

Privilege is awkward. This is the discomfort I felt as a boy at Abe's house. I did not want to be different than him. Just like I don't want to live in a world in which some people are far richer than most. But I do. So I try to help.

I also try to simplify my life. It must be said that often people are in need of help because of an economic system that works much better for some than others. This inequality can be addressed by the haves helping the have nots, or, more logically,

by the over-consumers ceasing to take more than their share. Simple helping sometimes ignores the fact that our over-consumption fuels exploitation and one way to help is to live simply. But that feels less rewarding. It doesn't fit neatly on a brochure.

Starving their dignity while feeding their bellies

We want helping to be simple. While in Brazil as an 18-year-old Mennonite Central Committee volunteer, I told my supervisor I was going to bring some groceries to a poor family I had met. He said the situation was more complicated than that. But I was compelled by the story of the family, so I brought them a little hamper anyway. "Give to those who beg of you," Jesus says. I couldn't just ignore the simple need before me.

The family happily accepted my charity. But did I do the best thing? Did I starve their dignity while feeding their bellies? Was I honest with myself about the situation and my motivations?

Or, in the case of my original example, should my family have shunned the Christmas hamper scheme from the beginning? Should we have befriended Abe's family over time, so that it would have been natural to have them over for Christmas dinner? Should we have attended the sort of church they went to? Should we have advocated, as others have more recently, for better wages in sectors dominated by Mennonite immigrants from Mexico? Should we have lived at such a standard that we would not have been high enough to reach down to help them?

We want help to be simple. But it isn't. Extricating the sin from our altruism is not simple, and, even if we do, the inherent inequality in most helping relationships remains. So where does that leave us? Keizer says imperfect help is better than no help. But this should not be used as an excuse to duck the complexities. Helpers who acknowledge and grapple with the complexities will be better helpers and hopefully better people than those who don't.

So what do we do about helping?

Ardently purify our motives. Simplify our lifestyles. Recover from the need to make a difference. Accept complexity. And, by the infinite grace of God, keep on trying. ➤

*This article originally appeared in *Canadian Mennonite*.

Will Braun is a religion writer based in Winnipeg where he lives with his wife and two young sons. His work has appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, *Huffington Post*, *United Church Observer* and *The Banner*. Braun served as founding co-editor of *Geez* magazine.



WINTER LIGHT

It's a milkiness poured from
a great glass bottle,
a carafe of blanc de blanc, iced,
a light shot with pale gold,
opalescent blue,
the distillation of pearl . . .
In this icy light, the ghostly fronds
of ice ferns cover the glass,
as the sky descends,
erasing first the far blue hills,
the cornfield hatchmarked with stubble,
coming to our street—
the sky flinging itself
down to the ground.
And the earth, like a feather bed,
accumulates layer on layer. . .
The snow bees are released from their
hive,
jive and jitter, sting at the blinds.
Down here, under this glazed china cup,
the minor fracas of our little lives
is still under the falling flakes.
And the great abalone shell of the sky
contains us, bits of muscle, tiny
mollusks.
These winter nights
are never black and dense,
but white, starlight
dancing off the land.
And then the luminous dawns,
the pearly skies full of hope
no matter what else we know.

NATIVITY

The amaryllis bulb, dumb as dirt,
inert, how can anything spring
from this clod, this stone,
the pit of some subtropical
atypical likely inedible fruit?
But it does: out of the dark
earth, two shoots, green
flames in December,
despite the short days,
the Long Night Moon
flooding the hard ground.
Nothing outside grows;
even small rodents
are burrowed in
the silent nights.

Then, one morning—
a single stalk,
then a bud
that swells, bells
full sail, full bellied,
the skin grows thin,
tighter, until it splits:
heralds the night
will not be endless,
that dawn will blossom,
pearly and radiant,
and two white
trumpets unfold, sing
their sweet song,
their Hallelujah chorus,
sing carols in the thin cold air,
and our mouths say O and O and O.



MORE



Barbara Crooker

Winter Light originally appeared in *Yarrow* and in Barbara Crooker's chapbook, *Ordinary Life* (Byline Press, 2001). It is reprinted here with permission.

Nativity has been featured in *Confluence* and in *Sojourners*. Reprinted with permission.

Barbara Crooker (barbaracrooker.com) is a poet living in Fogelsville, Pennsylvania. Her latest book is called *More* (C & R Press, 2010).



Features

A personal response to *Kisê-manitow Omiyikowiswin – The Creator's Gift*

Cathy Smith

Christian Courier is grateful for permission from the Indian Metis Christian Fellowship to share these selected paintings from the series *Kisê-manitow Omiyikowiswin – The Creator's Gift* by Ovide Bighetty. I've enjoyed viewing these art works on my computer screen for a few weeks now. There is something quietly reverent and peaceful about their two-dimensional flatness, but, at the same time, they are hardly placid or reserved. The vivid colours and boldly outlined shapes and symbols suggest a celebratory liveliness. I find it a sophisticated and powerful combination of moods, befitting the Christmas narrative.

Bighetty's Christmas story is not familiar, however, peopled with shamen and hunters rather than shepherds and Magi, dotted with evergreens rather than palm trees. But, for me, these stylized images of an aboriginal nativity display the profound universality of the Incarnation. The holy and particular gift of God unveiled in Bethlehem, Judea, is also given to all people in all times and places. The gift of a Saviour is a divine generosity that radiates unfathomably beyond the merely linear, encompassing past, present and future, and beyond boundaries, beyond earth itself to the vastnesses of the universe. In this series of paintings, Bighetty embraces Scripture's revelation and welcomes it home.

In the aboriginal setting, nature itself comes to worship at the manger. Here is soteriology embedded in water, animals, earth and sky. United by strong black outlines, everything touches everything else, and energy lines are kinetic symbols of the Creator's love animating the material world. "The whole creation has been groaning" Paul tells us in Romans, but now, at the birth of Christ, the whole creation pulsates with hope. I confess to being rather calloused by the constant and ubiquitous media eco-hype, but Bighetty's vision urges me to reflect whether my praise is authentic when I sing, "All nature sings, and round me rings / The music of the spheres."

The Woodland Cree "x-ray" style is designed to reveal the "inside" of a person. The technique offers an elegant balance between the exterior and the interior, an acknowledgement that the physical world and the spiritual world are of one piece. Joseph's dream is as real as the rock on which he rests his head. Elizabeth's and Mary's visionary intuitions belong to the same realm of "what is" as the swelling of their bellies. The "star of wonder" rests in the eye of the beholder of divine mystery as well as in the dark night sky above the stable. This style implicitly declares the supremacy of Christ, who is in all and over all, who created all things, "things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible" (Col. 1:16).

Bighetty's portrayal of Mary as a Cree woman touched me most deeply. Suddenly Mary is simply another woman, not a Galilean teenager. She's an everywoman, found willing and accepting, whom God has honoured with a sacred task. Removing the specificity of Mary's Jewishness sanctions an extravagant identification, transcending even gender, as each one of us, for a moment, can put ourselves in her place, characterize ourselves as favoured by God, called to be servants, appointed to holy duties in our own times and places. In the dignified posture of Mary, the Cree mother of the Holy Child, I find the courage to plead, "Saviour, be born again ... in me."

Ultimately, these pictures of Christmas in the woods of Turtle Island remind us of our common humanity, as we, humble and needy people of all races and ethnicity, follow the star to worship the Infant Holy. Crowded before the manger, we discover unity and grace as the Bright Morning Star sheds his light upon the nations.

Frederick Buechner wrote, "In a world that for the most part steers clear of the whole idea of holiness, art is one of the few places left where we can still speak to each other of holy things." Ovide Bighetty's work calls us, like Mary, to "ponder all these things."

Cathy Smith is the features editor for Christian Courier. She lives in Wyoming, Ontario.

Paintings from top: Prophecies to Mary, Acceptance, Vision, The Holy Child is Born, Prophecies to Hunters.



Features

Portrait of the Artist and The Commissions with Indian Metis Christian Fellowship



Ovide Bighetty is a Cree (Missinippi-Ethiniwak) self-taught artist originally from Pukatawagan First Nation on the Missinippi River in north western Manitoba. Bighetty has been painting for the past 21 years.

Bighetty began his career as a painter while in Grade 12 in Winnipeg. "My teacher was really frustrated with me. She said, 'I'm tired of you sitting around here and doing nothing. I'm going to bring something in and I want you to take a look at it, maybe this is what you need,'" recalled Bighetty. His teacher brought in a painting by Norval Morrisseau and that single painting sparked something inside Bighetty. "Those colors and that style just caught my eye right away," said Bighetty. "I just picked up a paint brush and she gave me a canvas and I just started painting. I copied that painting I don't know how many times, just over and over and over again." It

took some time to understand the technique and style that Morrisseau used; however, Ovide was determined to learn as much as he could. "Once I caught on, I just started doing my own designs," says Bighetty.

Following high school, Bighetty worked in many different fields from commercial fishing to the technology sector to working with youth, but art remains the centre of his being. Ovide enjoys sharing his works around Turtle Island and the many gatherings he's attended and he continues to create images based on spirituality, stories, symbolism and legends passed down by elders.

A traditional teaching of Aboriginal people in Canada is that before Europeans reached the eastern shores of Turtle Island, their elders had visions of people coming from the east with messages from the Creator. Inspired by that tradition, Indian Metis Christian Fellowship commissioned Ovide Bighetty to create series of painting depicting the visions of those Aboriginal elders.

In 2002, the ministry commissioned Bighetty to create 'Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin – The Creator's Sacrifice.' This series of 17 images in acrylic on canvas presented the Easter story in Ovide's unique Woodland Cree style.

In 2006, Ovide completed his second commission for IMCF, 'Steps Along the Red Road Following Christ the Creator.' These multimedia pieces feature images in acrylic on canvas, eagle feathers, and teachings integrated in shadow boxes constructed of birch, plexiglas, and Baltic birch plywood.

In 2007, Ovide created a third commission for IMCF, 'Kisê-manitow Omiyikowiswin – The Creator's Gift.' This series of 17 images depicting the Christmas story was painted on Baltic birch plywood and framed in maple.

For each commission, Ovide consulted with elders from Pukatawagan and in the urban communities of Regina and Winnipeg where he painted the commissions. A significant challenge was to depict the teachings in a way consistent with both aboriginal symbolism and the biblical sources. He said such art does take time to create because it's important to capture the essence of the story and interpret it without changing its meaning.

A "reForming Relationships" exhibition, featuring Ovide's 'Kisemanito Pakitinasuwin – The Creator's Sacrifice' is planned for May 2012 in Sarnia, Ontario. For more information, contact Diane Plug (519-383-1096 or dplug@ebtech.net).

This biography was provided by IMCF.

Paintings: Shamen Worship Jesus, Departing, The People Mourn.



The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

Luke 1: 35a

May you and your loved ones experience God's great love with peace and joy as we remember the gift of His Son this Christmas and throughout the New Year.



"Annunciation" by Scott Asman '11



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Features

All the best of the season

Jacqueline DeJong

Sarah sighed as she readjusted the four shopping bags, purse and coat. She wished she'd left the coat in the car as she'd planned, but the frigid air that struck her when she opened the door caused her to abandon that idea, and she'd kept it on. Now, however, with sweat trickling down her back, she wished she'd stuck to her original plan. Of course, that wasn't the only original plan she'd abandoned this Christmas season. As usual, resolutions of sticking to a budget and getting the shopping out of the way early had also been broken. But what bothered her most was that her resolve to finally get up the courage to invite one of her neighbours to church this Christmas had also petered out. Of course, Christmas wasn't over yet, but Sarah's desire for a meaningful Christmas was. Right now, she just wanted to survive the next few days, and then collapse. In fact, collapsing *right now* was tempting what with the weight of all the bags in her hands.



Rounding the corner of one of the mall's hallways, Sarah spotted the Salvation Army kettle. Guiltily, Sarah avoided eye contact with its elderly attendant. She just didn't have the energy to put everything down and fish for some change. She made a mental note to send them something next month – if the credit card bills left anything over. Being in the hurry that she was, Sarah was aggravated to notice that the hallway ahead was crowded with people gathered around a group of children who were singing Christmas carols. Just what I need, she thought, another rendition of *O Come, All Ye Faithful*. A tiny voice in her head whispered that it was, indeed, just what she needed, but Sarah pushed the thought aside. She would try to get back on track with devotions after this busy season was over.

After what seemed like an endless wait at yet another checkout, Sarah finally left the mall to head for her car. Rats, it had snowed while she'd shopped, and she'd have to clear the windows. Sighing, she scrounged around for the scraper and started tackling her windows. She knew she should do a better job than she was doing, but she just didn't care. A few seconds later, she realized what a lousy job she'd done, nearly plowing into a car as she backed out of her spot. The driver honked and gestured rudely at her. Sarah resisted the urge to return the finger salute. Thanks to the fish symbol on her car, Sarah rarely allowed herself to give in to that particular vice. Of course other vices, sins, if she was being honest with herself, seemed more than ready to take its place.

Staying home was really all for the best

As she drove home slowly through the busy streets, she contemplated skipping the Christmas Eve service that evening. Thanks to the snow and all the last-minute shoppers, the drive home was going to make her late. Besides, she'd have to take a quick shower due to the turtleneck

plastered against her back from the heat in the mall. Years ago, when the kids were young, she would never have gotten away with skipping church. But now they were out of the house, and she and Mark were on their own again. She knew that Mark might protest a bit, but he'd been coughing earlier, and it wouldn't be that hard to convince him that having a quiet evening at home was really all for the best.

As she rounded the corner of her street, Sarah noticed her next door neighbor, Marge, pulling into the adjacent driveway. By the time she'd parked the car and popped the trunk, Marge had crossed over to her half. Once more, an uneasy conviction that she really hadn't done anything to invite her neighbours to church crossed her mind, but she quickly pushed the thought aside. She debated whether to nod politely or speak. Marge took the decision away by walking right up to her and asking if she had a moment. No, Sarah thought, I don't. But, not wanting to be rude, she said, "Sure."

"It's like this," Marge began. "My dad is staying with us for the holidays, and he's really getting on our nerves. We're getting lectures on our entertainment choices, and he's been on our case about going to church. Well, my husband had a brain wave this morning and said, since you folks always go to church – even on Christmas Eve, maybe you wouldn't mind taking him. That way he's happy, and we get an evening without nagging. Anyway, I know it's a bit last minute, but we'd really appreciate it if you'd take him along. That is," she suddenly broke off, "if you have time. You're probably going to need the whole evening just to get those gifts wrapped."

Sarah kept her facial expression neutral, conflicting thoughts racing through her mind. How was she going to tell Marge that she was planning on staying home, curled up with a good book, watching *It's a Wonderful Life* or some other Christmas DVD? Of course, Marge had offered her an out, suggesting she'd be too busy wrapping gifts, anyway.

"Actually," she replied, "the gifts don't need to be wrapped up until later since we're not doing our gift exchange until the 27th. So, yeah, I guess we can take your dad along tonight."

"Great!" Marge exclaimed. "What time do you leave? I'll make sure Dad is ready on time. And, hey, 'All the best of the season!'"

"We leave at seven thirty," Sarah mumbled. She grabbed the handles of her shopping bags and started towards her front door. "All the best of the season" echoed in her mind. Here she'd prayed for an opening with her neighbour, and, just when it was rather unwelcome, an opening presented itself. Breathing a quick prayer, she turned and called out to Marge.

Marge turned. She took a few steps back. "What's up? You can't take Dad after all?"

"No," Sarah replied, "It's just that when you wished me all the best of the season, I realized that I hadn't returned the sentiment!"

"Don't worry about it. Getting Dad out of my hair for the evening is giving us the best of the season. Trust me."

"Actually," Sarah went on, "what I meant to say is that the best of the season is knowing Jesus – his birth, life, and death are what really count. And I was wondering...." She faltered and looked down in embarrassment, but then resolutely looked up, and contin-



'What name is given in Bethlehem?'

I came to Bethlehem to see a newborn child,
and saw the Son of God and Son of Man.
Creator of the winds and waves,
Ancient of Days,
once high-enthroned, then sleeping babe.
Without the eyes of faith to see,
I'd never have known the Prince before me.
I would have said it could not be.
How could the great I AM wear baby flesh like
you and me?
How could the eternal Word be written in earth-
bound script?

But . . . the Branch of Jesse boundaries shred,
no longer shrouded in my doubts.
The Lamb of God tore limits loose
for our own good, to set us free.
Salvation lay in manger wood
till on the splintered cross he hung,
till "**It is finished!**" was his cry,
and Easter songs victoriously sung.
Now risen Christ, ascended high,
High Priest enthroned in rightful place,
pours out his love on you and me
with endless prayers and lavish grace.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



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ued, "I was wondering if you and your husband would like to join us in celebrating the real meaning of Christmas, too?"

"Uh, I doubt it, but I'll ask him," Marge stuttered. "But thanks, anyway."

O Come, All Ye Faithful

When 7:30 rolled around, Sarah was disappointed to see that only Marge's dad appeared ready to go to church. Marge said a hurried thanks and disappeared quickly, probably afraid she'd be put on the spot with another church invite.

Later, as Sarah sat in church between her husband and Dave, Marge's dad, they joined in the singing of *O Come, All Ye Faithful*. She recalled, wryly, her frantic pace all season and her irritation earlier that day in the mall. Next year, she vowed, she'd be more prepared, not just in terms of the busyness and shopping, but especially in regards to sharing with others the true meaning of Christmas. As the music ended, the pastor directed them to the reading from Luke 2. Silently Sarah prayed that she'd be given another opportunity to share with her neighbours "All the best of the Season." ✨

Jacqueline DeJong teaches Grade 4 at
Calvin Christian School in Hamilton, Ont.



Columns

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke



Driving home from Waterloo one night I suspected I might make the return trip before sunrise. After attending a writers' meeting in the city I had stopped in on my daughter, Jessica. Only two days away from her due date, she paced the floor awkwardly. Uncertainty clouded her eyes. "I don't know, Mom," she said, "I can't tell if this is labour or something else."

I lay in bed willing myself to rest, only to rediscover that the harder you try to sleep, the less likely your success. I thought about Jess and the baby. Through the wonders of ultrasound we already knew it was a boy. "Oh Lord," I prayed, "You know his name and every detail of the life you've ordained for him. Please keep him safe, Father. Watch over his weary momma. Give her strength for childbirth and courage for the challenges ahead..."

As often happens I drifted off while talking to my Creator. I'm thankful he understands my frailty.

The phone jarred me back into consciousness. Jess was on her way to the hospital. I took a quick shower, brewed a strong cup of coffee and headed out into the darkness.

Driving from our house to Grand River Hospital takes an hour. I tried not to speed. But what if she gave birth before I arrived? I should have skipped the shower. A speeding ticket would definitely slow me down. I backed off the gas pedal.

In the delivery room Alain (the baby's father) and I would be Jessica's support people. My older daughter, Stephanie, took up her vigil in the family lounge, just outside of the birthing centre.

Jessica sprawled on the narrow hospital bed, her face registering a mix of pain and anticipation. Minke, her midwife and a personal friend, had been with her for a couple of hours already. She worked quietly, charting notes and monitoring the baby. Jess managed a weak smile for me. I stroked her forehead and gave her my best "everything is just fine" look in return. She turned uneasily on the bed, her whole body quaking.

Alain slouched into a well-worn recliner beside the bed. I withdrew to a small bench recessed into an alcove. I pulled my knees up and propped my head against the wall. The second hand swept around the clock's face. In the movies they sometimes speed up the story by forwarding the clock. I wondered what position the hands would be in when my new grandson arrived.

My baby was having a baby. Was it really 25 years since I had my last child? I remembered her silky soft skin and newborn scent as I cuddled her the day she was born, and the look of awe in the faces of James and Stephanie when they beheld their baby sister for the first time. Not quite five years old, they suddenly seemed so grown up compared to the new arrival.

Special delivery

No progress

Now the hours dragged past. Jessica's pain intensified and became relentless. There were no breaks between contractions and there was no progress with the baby. Finally she requested an epidural.

I prayed.

Another hour passed, still no anaesthetic. I wanted to step into the hall and scream at someone, anyone. I decided to visit Stephanie in the waiting room instead. After ten minutes I picked up the phone beside the birthing centre entrance and asked to re-enter.

"The doctor is with her now," came the reply. "You'll have to wait."

Stephanie assured me they wouldn't let the baby be born without me. When they finally allowed me back in, I resolved not to leave Jessica's side again. She rested for awhile, building strength for the trial ahead.

Then came a solid hour of pushing. Minke and Meghan (the nurse) coaxed and coached. Between contractions I held a water bottle to Jessica's lips and swabbed her forehead with a cold cloth. But the baby made no headway. Jessica rested, and then tried again, until she simply could not carry on.

The doctor came in to assess the situation. She explained Jessica's options. This baby was bigger than anticipated, and unlikely to arrive without assistance. She talked about using "low forceps." Jess agreed to give it a try.

Once more Minke and Meghan positioned themselves. I wrapped my arms around Jessica's shoulders as the contractions started.

With every ounce of strength she could muster Jessica gave a mighty push.

Suddenly a tiny, roaring lion burst into the world!

His mommy scooped him up into her arms. Romario James Mukama had arrived – nine pounds, seven ounces, with hands and feet big enough to play pro basketball.



Romario James (RJ) arrived Oct. 5, 2011.

Through tears I gazed upon a fearfully, wonderfully made little miracle, and thanked the Lord for this very special delivery, and for allowing me to be part of it.

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Artful Eye



Nativity, by Emily Wierenga (canvaschild.com)

Christmas Eve on the Highway

A single star
fails to break through
the cloud filled sky
tonight.
Its hazy light
is disbursed
and the muggy atmosphere
of this foreign state
seems a far cry
from childhood's crisply defined
air of Christmas Eve.
In those days
warm blankets of snow
hugged the earth
and reflected the glorious light
of faith's star.
The sky was not filled
with knowledge
but with angels,
and my heart was filled
with songs that I still hear
but seldom sing
in the daily demands
that fill my adult days.

Then, the misty sentiment
of days when life and belief
were simpler
turns my mind to carols
on the car radio,
and I join the song
that's being carried across
the air waves and the years.
An angelic voice
speaks from nowhere
to my everywhere:
"Fear not!
Though the night seems dark,
there are good tidings
of great joy.
God breaks through
in ever new ways –
even through the rain
in foreign feelings and places.
You'll find God's love
in many mangers.
Rejoice that the message
is bigger than a single star
or the memory
of unfaltering faith."

Ruth Naylor



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Ruth Naylor is a former English teacher and retired pastor living in Bluffton, Ohio. Her poetry has been published in a variety of magazines, including *Alive Now* and *Christian Century*.



Reviews

**Alert to Glory**

by Sally Ito
Turnstone Press, 2011

Ito, her poems acting as lenses through which to view the divine more clearly.

For Ito, a native of Taber, Alberta, language is more than a means of communication. Rather, as conveyed through *Alert to Glory* – published this summer by Turnstone Press – it's a way of bringing kingdom-come.

Through carefully chosen juxtapositions, Ito turns the earth – and gospel – upside down. She accomplishes, in short, what she defines as the role of the poet: “to handcuff the world, make it prisoner to sense and scrutiny; to apprehend.”

Following in the footsteps of modern-day wordsmiths like Ann Voskamp and Luci Shaw, Ito seeks the holy in the every-day. As British poet and priest Malcolm Guite commented of Shaw, Ito finds “heaven in the ordinary.”

“The dominion is wonder, and eye the king, the glassy orb,” Ito writes in her rendition of Psalm Eight. “No

Alert to glory

Emily Wierenga

“Ordinary awe, the kind that filters through the fog of the everyday,” pens Winnipeg writer, editor and translator Sally Ito in her third compilation of poetry, *Alert to Glory*. “Shafts of sunlight on plant, slip of birdsong....”

These are the details, the unnecessary beauties, which give life its meaning, says

power, no lust in this, sheer appetite for the world.”

Ito excavates each moment, and even more, she takes theology, and pares it down to its underlying message. She makes the Bible relevant through pieces like “Sparrows”: “Today he is in the sparrows, in their ruffled ordinariness. From the window, they are, in the glare of holy every day, framed and hallowed prayer.”

Where others see small, brown birds – insignificant flits at the feeder – she sees God, in all of his creative wonder and in all of his watching of the sparrow fall. She watches for these parallels, every moment of every day, begging God for more of him so life on earth can become essentially, life in heaven.

In this Ito lets God, the cosmic “Tea Master”, serve her tea, turning the hours of day into “an eternity, a night of waxing and waning moons” in which she quietly sips. “And you serve, as always, grace,” she writes.

Yet, while nursing a cup of Earl Grey, Ito is not afraid to tackle the difficult, such as healing – and our attitude towards it. “In that forest of crutches by the church door, laid by those who know best that even walking is an act of faith, is a dim pathway, dark and cluttered with the sin of hoping too much.”

Hoping too much – a witch lies in wait, to cleanse the eye “by a self sore with want, crippled with need.”

Ito challenges believers to remember they are but one piece in a puzzle, “connecting to the other – or not – making a picture of the whole.” She begs us, be led by a child, for, “I’m the poem, he says, Look at me! And he holds up his hand, star to my face,” thirsting in these dark hours of motherhood. And then “silver light falls across

(my child’s) face and for a moment, she is fallen cherub, fallen time in the brief season of a mother’s gaze.”

Ito revels in the mundane, for nothing, she says, slips past God’s gaze, not even the fruit in the bowl, the blueberries which are “well-travelled souls . . . gleaned from wooded fields by strange hands” Ito also compares them to “night sky’s dark gems glistening in the morning light.”

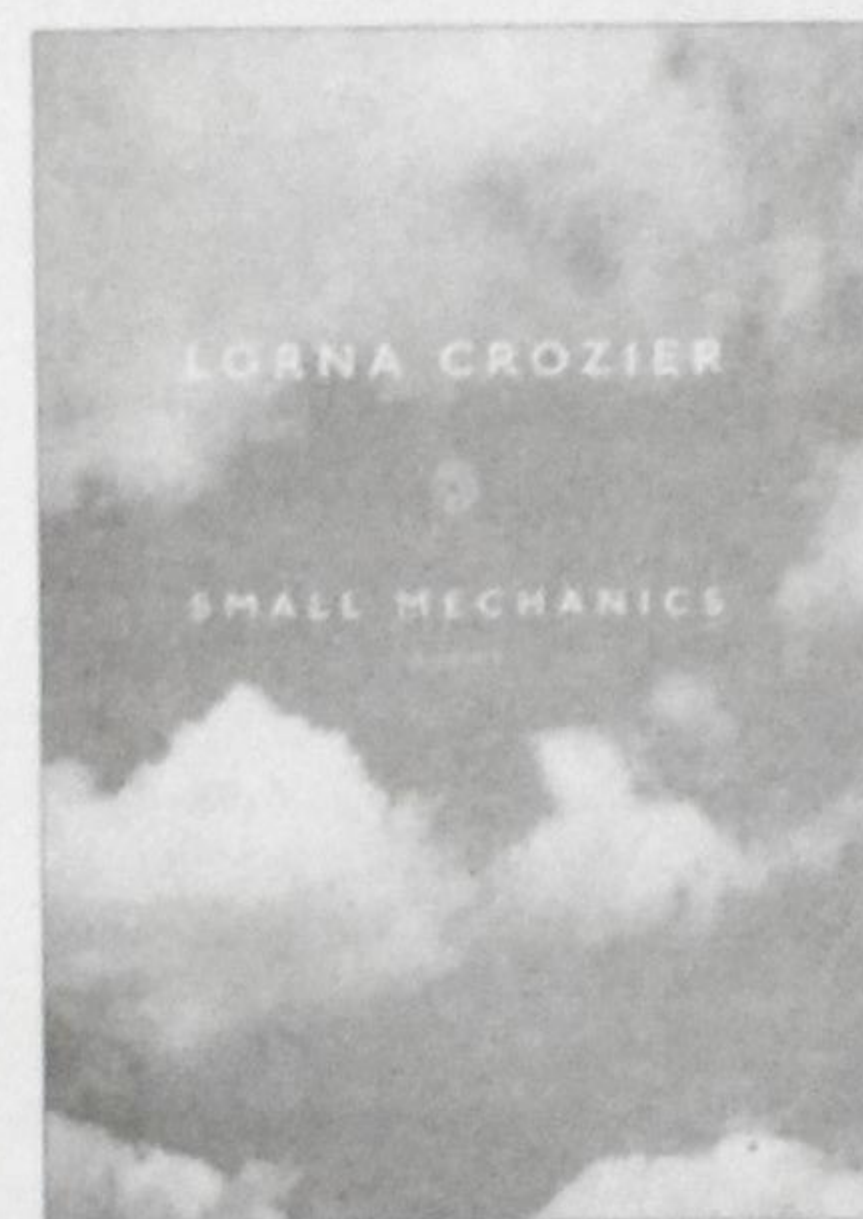
It is this attention to detail that arrests me as a reader, pulling me deeper into the comforting lap of heaven. Ito waits, as do I (as does God, apparently) for the turning of the tomato, “pure light affixing to each fruit as if on a sparrow, a hair on the head – a gaze that yearns and is made captive, waiting for an aria about to unfold from the green throat. . . .”

To handcuff the world, make it prisoner to sense and scrutiny; to apprehend – that is the poet’s task.

And Ito makes me long to see, year-round, the hand of the divine – the intimately divine – in both the hum-drum and the holy, in the skin of a baby, in the tongue-speaking congregant and in the faith-walking healed. To see him in that which the church has overlooked.

After all, this life “happens so swiftly, this marathon of days – the length of a wisp of grass – because it ends, and ends again each time we look back at what it was to have tasted sweetness in the mouth from the salt of our remembering.”

Emily Wierenga is an author, artist, and freelance writer living in Neerlandia, Alberta. For more information, please visit emilywierenga.com.

**Small Mechanics**

by Lorna Crozier
McClelland and Stewart, 2011

master them in order to both break and to create.

The poems in Lorna Crozier’s collection, *Small Mechanics*, capture such sensible motions of everyday objects, from onions bouncing in a curved basket to meadow seeds that catch in the sock. She plucks poetry from life’s sensory logic; she pays attention – this I knew when I read her book’s epigraph, a verse from its title poem: “I want a poet who goes outside, / Who knows the small mechanics / of the clothespin and the muddy boot.”

But Crozier is not concerned with recording matters of physics for their own sake. Her poetic “mechanics” celebrate the living – the creatures and people who work, feel, play and age in our world of working parts.

Many of the collection’s poems explore memory and grief as they are carried in objects and actions, with Crozier’s deceased parents a common presence. In “What Comes Next,” for example, she recalls scenes from her childhood on a prairie home: “At supper, the fish fried

Odes to the great and small

Adele Kronyndyk

As kids my sisters and I used ice-cubed apple juice and clothespins to make popsicles we hoped to sell by the road. At first we had no real method of cracking the pins in two. Eventually, though, we learned to gently pull their backs apart and slide the wooden portions free from the grip of the spring. The mechanics mattered – we needed to

in butter, / [my mother] fingers through my portion for the thin / white slivers that could catch my breath / No one’s ever loved me better” (70). Grief perplexes her – especially its ability to inhabit the natural world. When she imagines the afterlife in “My Father, Face to Face,” she wonders if “We’ll feel no more” she says, “than wind, than grass” but adds “though sometimes / both to me seem full of sorrow.”

Yet there’s playfulness in this collection, too – silliness, even, thanks to Crozier’s lyrical wit. She enchants the most commonplace occasions. A typo sparks a short but clever work of tragicomedy (“Grief Resume”). In “My Last Erotic Poem” she teases tenderness from the strange, awkward oft-dreaded tolls of age – “old bodies doing what you know / bodies do, worn and beautiful and shameless” (28-29). She knows her way around the mechanics of amusement, using them to break embarrassment into play.

***I want a poet who goes outside,
Who knows the small mechanics
of the clothespin and the muddy boot.***

Not all poets can effectively bring to life both the miniscule and the grand and magnificent of this world in the same one collection. But Crozier does – organically, originally, brilliantly. Whether she’s pondering the olfactory organs on an ant’s antenna or observing “The Ambiguity of Clouds”, even her repeated images and odd turns of phrase speak freshly of familiar truths. Yes, she uses moon imagery often – she is aware, however, of the sentimentality risked, as evidenced in “Night Walk” line: “The moon’s so tired of metaphor, it wants / no more

of human longing” (11-12). Similarly, in “What Holds You,” she revives the common observation of everything of youth seeming small by noting: “The sky’s / the only childhood thing / that isn’t smaller / than you remember it” (10-13). Cliché she is not.

It’s tempting to say Crozier has a Psalmist’s attention to all things great and small. Some may dislike such a description, however, as she is not (to my knowledge) a religious poet as in an artist who ascribes to one religion. Still, I do sense in her an undercurrent of and respect for spirituality. Some stems from her imagery of angels and the multiple the narratives of Eden. To me, though, these don’t encapsulate Crozier’s value to the Christian reader. This lies in her eye for describing the created so that it sings with the possibility of a loving and inventive creator. “A swarm of dragonflies! So intricate and golden, / surely a watchmaker assembled their parts / to give his children a lighter, leaner sense of time” (1-3) she says in “Holy One”. She reminds me too that even the most miniscule mechanics reveal the handiwork of holiness and that, for some, they may do so even more evocatively than the vast and magnificent.

Crozier scouts for beauty eagerly and, upon finding it, celebrates both its logic and its mystery. I believe this posture is the best gift she has to offer her reader – especially the reader that shares her desire to creatively take life great and small to the page. This collection – Crozier’s sixteenth book of poetry – proves her to be a master of language’s mysterious mechanics, and a writer deserving of her status as one of the most well-read poets in Canada.

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Features

No different than anyone else

Rachel Boehm

For nearly a decade now, I've been writing articles about sustaining pastoral excellence. In approximately 20 articles, I have tried to share tips, experiences and the latest research about healthy pastors and congregations, covering topics like peer support, looking after the pastor's family, lifelong learning and how to prevent stress and burnout.

Along the way, I learned that pastors—despite their unique position in the church—are not special or unique in terms of what they need to thrive. Like us, pastors need to be surrounded by peers who support them, hold them accountable and encourage them. Pastors, like all of us, need time to relax and opportunities to learn and sharpen their skills. They need to be able to devote time to create healthy marriages and families. Finally, like all of us, pastors need to be a part of a loving community and have meaningful relationships.

Peer support

Many of the tips for wellness shared with me by pastors revolved around peer group involvement. Rev. Henry Kranenburg, pastor of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Hamilton, Ontario, put it this way: peer support helps leaders “fight against the tunnel vision of their own particular style.”

“Peer groups help pastors learn that the value of working together is in being challenged to think outside of one's normal paradigm,” he said.

In recent years, peer groups have thrived in the CRC and other denominations. But peer support isn't limited to participation in structured groups, and neither is peer learning the exclusive domain of pastors. By taking part in

mentoring relationships, joining book clubs or study groups or even participating in a hobby or sports club, peer support can make us stronger and help us find solutions for challenges we face.

Healthy marriages and family life

Devoting intention and time to healthy marriages and home lives is also crucial. Churches, like many employers, sometimes forget how important family relationships are to productivity at work. “We realized that many church councils weren't taking seriously enough the task of caring for the pastor and the pastor's family,” said Rev. Ed Gerber, one of the authors of *Marriage and Ministry* published by the CRC's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program. “We also concluded that many pastors neglect to care for their marriages and families to the extent that they should.”

“Experience has taught us that healthy marriages contribute to healthy homes and healthy children, and happy homes support and contribute to healthy and vibrant pastoral ministries,” said Gerber.

Work-Life Balance

In a caring profession, it can be easy to let service of others takes precedence over caring for oneself. However, many pastors told me that, without self-care, it eventually becomes impossible to properly care for others.

Rev. Bob Zomermaand, a retired parish pastor, learned the hard way. “I myself fell victim to the temptation to work too much,” wrote Zomermaand in his article *Caring for Pastors*. “I became fatigued in my spirit, in my emotions and my body. As a result, I lost my ability to be a useful tool in the Lord's hand. The very thing

I so desired to be and to do was beyond my reach.”

Lifelong Learning

Part of self-care is taking the time to learn and grow. As in any workplace, technology and new practices constantly evolve and can shape church ministries for better or worse. Those who fail to keep learning new skills will not be as resilient in the face of change.

Seminary should represent the beginning of a pastor's learning journey, said Rev. Kathy Smith, Director of Continuing Education for Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. “Instead of trying to teach students everything they need to know, we try to teach them that they will have to be responsible for their learning from here on out.”

Don't go it alone

Pastors face unique challenges in developing friendships because of their unique position in the church, but those barriers aren't insurmountable. Pastors can seek to establish friendships through school or community connections. They can befriend other pastors or take part in ecumenical groups.

“Pastors are no different than anyone else,” said Rev. Mark Vermaire, pastor of Crossroads Christian Reformed Church in San Marcos, California. “We were created by God to live in community.”

What pastors “really want is to know and to be known,” concluded Rev. Don Orange, pastor of Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Greeley, Colorado. “Isn't that what everyone's heart is crying out for?”

Rachel Boehm is a communications specialist and a freelance writer. She lives near Halifax, Nova Scotia.



The Exiles is a group of four pastors and their spouses from California and Washington. Their focus is on exploring pastoral excellence for engaging in emerging and missional ministry. When asked what they have learned in their group so far, one member replied, “I've been amazed at the different models for ministry that we've seen (in each other and some of the folks that we've rubbed shoulders with). I'm reminded that saying ‘yes’ to God's call looks differently for all who answer.”



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Columns

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman



According to the United Nations, the world population has now passed seven-billion people. At a press event marking the milestone, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon commented that we live in a world of "terrible contradictions" in which there are lavish lifestyles for a few but poverty for many others. It is estimated that 39 percent of the world's population have unsafe drinking water, 35 percent do not have improved sanitation, 24 percent do not have electricity, 15 percent do not have adequate housing and 13 percent go hungry every day. A recent UNESCO report entitled "Engineering: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities for Development" sketches the role that engineering can play in helping improve lives in the developing world.

There are historical examples of how technology has helped bring significant changes to people's well-being. One example is smallpox, a devastating disease which was eventually eradicated in the 1970s. Another is rural electrification, which brought power to many remote areas in the United States in the 1930s; even small quantities of power can improve people's lives. More recently, cell phones have brought communications into regions of developing countries where phones were previously non-existent.

Although technology is not the answer to human troubles, *appropriate technology* can contribute to helping people to flourish. The notion of appropriate technology was popularized by Ernst Schumacher in an influential book published in the early 1970s entitled *Small is Beautiful*. The subtitle of the book was "Economics as if People Mattered" and it challenged many previous assumptions about economic progress and profit. Appropriate technology emphasizes technology that is small scale, energy efficient, affordable, environmentally sound, locally maintainable and culturally appropriate. A more recent book entitled *Design for the Other 90%* illustrates some nifty examples of appropriate technology for the developing world such as portable water filters, bamboo treadle pumps, solar power and gravity-powered drip irrigation systems.

Increased interest

In recent years there has been an increasing interest in organizations like Engineers Without Borders who provide assistance in places like rural Africa. Others have begun to collaborate on appropriate technology through web forums such as Engineering For Change (engineeringforchange.org). The IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers), an engineering organization and one of the largest professional associations in the world, recently sponsored its first conference on global humanitarian technology.

Appropriate technology

Over the past year I have participated in a project led by a retired Redeemer professor (Henry Brouwer) and a friend (Maurice Veldhuis) to develop appropriate technology for lighting in sub-Saharan Africa. The idea is to harness locally-available bicycles with inexpensive generators to power efficient LED lights as an alternative to lighting from kerosene-fuelled lamps. The motivation for the project is to help provide adequate and sustainable lighting to facilitate evening literacy classes. As the project progresses, we are not only learning more about the technological choices, but also about the cultural issues.

Cultural appropriateness is crucial. I recently heard a story of a well-intentioned bio-gas fuel project to provide cooking fuel in a developing region. The project failed because of local cultural taboos regarding human fecal matter: people were averse to use gas from human waste to cook their food. Cultural appropriateness also encompasses the problems that arise due to unintended consequences when new technologies disrupt local cultures and practices.

Many problems can arise when technology is applied in humanitarian situations. Equipment is sometimes "dumped" as a donation without assistance or follow-up. Some projects are plagued by poor logistics and planning. Some donations, like old computers, are sometimes sent overseas where they soon fail. In these contexts, there is the additional problem of the lack of proper facilities for disposal of electronics, many of which contain harmful chemicals like lead and cadmium. Problems can occur when high-tech solutions are attempted in low-tech environments, or when there is a lack of long-term commitment to a project.

The book *When Helping Hurts* provides a Christian perspective on development work. It warns against paternalism and "blueprint" approaches to development work and argues for a more participatory approach. It discusses issues of cross-cultural work and some of the pitfalls that accompany short-term missions projects. It provides many helpful suggestions for North Americans looking to do development work in the majority world.

As the earth's population con-

Dr. Henry Brouwer pedals a prototype of a bike equipped with a generator to power LED lights for use in developing nations.



tinues to grow, the principles of appropriate technology are becoming increasingly relevant not only in the developing world but also in the developed world. Appropriate technology is an approach that can help us answer the call to show love for our neighbours and to help care for the earth and its creatures.

Dr. Derek Schuurman is a computer science professor at Redeemer University College and recently attended the first IEEE Global Humanitarian Technology Conference.

Resetting the holiday table



Emily Cramer

Sometimes I wonder if I married the right man. Like the other day when, after half an hour of bathroom scrubbing, I found a smeary man's boot print glazed onto the white tiles. Or when there are dirty socks lying on the floor beside the laundry basket. Again. These are minor annoyances in the grand scheme of life, but accumulated over weeks, months, and years, they have a tendency to add petals to the "I-love-you-not" side of the daisy. I have a flexible and gracious spouse, and yet our four short years of marriage have made me genuinely reverent before couples who have achieved decades.

It isn't news that marriage is hard or that the divorce rate has increased dramatically in recent decades. Once a difficult issue for churches to navigate, divorce has moved well down the list of theologically challenging topics, in part because it is so common it has touched nearly everyone. I never had to think a great deal about it until it affected my own family with two siblings' decision to divorce. Observing those crumbling relationships over the years, I realized there is a spectrum of reasons for deciding to leave a marriage, and sometimes the decision is made under the direst circumstances. That is reason enough for wise and loving Christians to reserve judgment.

And yet, is it possible to treat this topic too lightly or as too commonplace? Can we withhold judgment of individual circumstances while still acknowledging the widespread destruction that results from

divorce? I know that, years later, the ripples are still expanding in my family. Familiar faces are abruptly absent from family gatherings, silent gaps in their places, children left to celebrate holidays with only one parent. Family traditions change forever as do family trees, wedding photos are slowly taken off walls, relationships become awkwardly undefined. In time new members are added, some with children of their own, and the family is asked to welcome into its intimate space individuals with whom emotional ties have not yet developed. And these are the minor things in comparison to dismantled households and deep wounds of anger. The sacred space of shared history, memories and trust is interrupted, sometimes permanently.

Determination

If God really meant to create one flesh through marriage – which, if we believe the Bible we must assume he did – then it should come as no surprise that divorce creates death. And as marriage is a building block of larger communities, that death does not always fall in predictable places. I am just a sibling, and yet I have experienced it in a myriad small ways: the death of relationship as I mourn for missing members around the holiday table; the death of stability as I re-navigate my support network; the death of unity to find myself grieving while a sibling is celebrating a new relationship. Such grief seems unacceptable, especially in light of the biblical imperative to rejoice with those who rejoice. And yet there it is, raging away in my own heart, harming my relationships with those who are rejoicing.

Divorce in my family has challenged my faith in marriage and even, in the darkest times, my faith in the creator of marriage. Perhaps reflecting on the painful by-products of divorce is an attempt to shore up my own resolve. I am only four years in, and I know there is rough terrain ahead. James Dobson wrote, "It is not enough to make a great start toward a long-term marriage. You will need the determination to keep plugging, even when every fibre in your body longs for (something else)." Unmarried, words like *determination* sound terribly unromantic; married, they can be a lifeline.

In encouraging dogged determination, we, the church, risk hurting and alienating those whose marriages have not survived. Without question, our job is to reach out to those who are wounded, and divorce leaves many casualties who need the grace and restoration of Christ mediated by the church. But somewhere between condemnation and apathy there must exist a little space – maybe a huge space – for remembering the rewards of marriage and supporting others in striving for them. The pain in my family has had its fruit: it has helped me to understand why this sacrament was intended for permanency. It has sharpened my desire to endure the bad and grow through it, so I can be richly blessed by all that is good.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and teaches in the Liberal Arts at Georgian College. She is currently reading, and intrigued by, *The Eyre Affair* by Jasper Fforde.

Columns

The Public Square

Harry Antonides



On Sept. 23, 2011, one day after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad addressed the UN General Assembly, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke from the same podium. He began by reminding his audience that since the founding of Israel 63 years ago, it has extended its hand of friendship and peace to all its surrounding nations and to the world, including the Palestinian people. But Israel has often been denounced and judged by a double standard in the halls and deliberations of the UN.

Netanyahu said that he did not come to win applause, but to speak the truth in a place that has often been "a place of darkness for my country." The truth is that Israel wants peace with a Palestinian state, "but the Palestinians want a state without peace." He reviewed the history of Islamic-inspired violence, and warned that if Iran is not prevented from developing nuclear weapons the world will be faced with the tragedy of nuclear terrorism.

Israel is repeatedly advised that it must make concessions. But each time it has done so, as when it withdrew from Gaza and Lebanon, the attacks did not slow down. On the contrary, they increased in ferocity, including thousands of rockets, supplied by Iran, which rained on Israeli cities and villages. All the while, the so-called peace partner, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, refuses to negotiate.

Let there be peace

Netanyahu has pleaded with President Mahmoud Abbas to start negotiations without preconditions. He did so in his address at the UN, as follows: "President Abbas, you've dedicated your life to advancing the Palestinian cause. Must this conflict continue for generations, or will we enable our children and grandchildren to speak in years ahead of how we found a way to end it? That's what we should aim for, and that's what I believe we can achieve ... Our destinies are intertwined. Let us realize the vision of Isaiah ... 'The people who walk in darkness will see a great light.' Let that light be the light of peace."

Netanyahu's speech was a stirring ap-



In his address to the UN General Assembly, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pleaded with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to negotiate a lasting peace.

Israel caught in the clash of civilizations

peal for Israel's right to exist in peace and security. Here is this tiny country where the Jewish people literally made the desert bloom and built a thriving civilization that even took in one million Arabs – in contrast to the surrounding Arab countries that expelled its Jewish population because they wanted to be *Judenrein*.

Since its founding in 1948, Israel has been forced to fight five major wars and has experienced countless terrorist attacks on defenceless men, women and children. Here is my attempt to summarize Israel's precarious position:

1. Israel is continually placed on the defensive by the demands that it must be flexible and willing to negotiate away its territory. Meanwhile the Western authorities, including the Obama White House, are unwilling to insist that the Palestinians stop their attacks on Israel. The heart of the conflict is not about territory, but about the very existence of the state of Israel. That became very clear when Yasser Arafat refused to accept the Camp David offer in 2000 despite the fact that he had obtained nearly every one of the Palestinian demands.

2. The many "roadmaps" of Israel-Palestine negotiations were bound to lead nowhere because Israel's major enemies are constitutionally bound to the destruction of Israel. The countless number of mostly American-driven efforts to negotiate a peace agreement have been a game of smoke and mirrors. These efforts were all make-believe and have created a mirage that has had the perverse effect of glorifying the "oppressed" Palestinians and demonizing Israel!

3. Netanyahu's speech was a moving appeal on behalf of a small, historically much-persecuted people, who are now surrounded by enemies who have sworn their destruction. This is the time for all people with a sense of justice to stand with Israel. If all freedom-loving countries would openly take a stand and declare that they consider an attack on Israel an attack on the entire free world, this would be a tremendous act of solidarity and protection.

4. Nobody should imagine that what happens to Israel is insignificant and will not affect us very much. The truth is that Israel is – again – in the frontlines of the clash between two civilizations that are polar opposites. If we stand by and do not lift a finger to prevent the destruction of Israel, the only democratic and vibrant civilization in that part of the world, we signal to those who have declared war on us that we will hoist the white flag of surrender. I pray that will not happen. ➤

Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) retired as director of the former Work Research Foundation. He lives in Willowdale, Ontario.

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien



If you've been to Europe I think you'll agree that the Europeans have us beat when it comes to making good bread. They don't eat the spongy white bread that's so popular with Canadians – you know, the stuff you have to toast. Europeans tend to eat wholesome breads.

Rye bread is popular in European countries. Ah, good rye bread! My wife and I love it. And we almost always have a package of the Holtzheuser Bros. black pumpnickel bread in the refrigerator. It is a product of Holland, and is made from wholemeal rye flour with no preservatives added. It is always available at our local grocery stores.

Ukrainian wheat has always been known for making the best bread. Ukraine, the breadbasket of Europe, has a rich black fertile soil which produces grain in great abundance. Two-thirds of Ukraine's soil is black, roughly 12 million hectares. The black soil can be three to four feet deep and some places the black soil goes down 50 feet. (By comparison, our topsoil is usually only five or six inches deep). Most of the country is flat; 95 percent is plains and the remaining five per cent is mountains.

According to Agriculture and Agri-food Canada's web publication, "From a single seed: Tracing the Marquis wheat success story in Canada to its roots in the Ukraine," it is estimated that 25,000 different varieties of wheat have been produced worldwide. Ancient Ukrainian wheats, especially winter ones, were famous throughout the world – and not just as food grain. They played a very important role in world agriculture as seed grain, mainly because of their high quality and resistance to cold. In fact, the Ukraine was one of the world's major areas for both spring and winter wheat as early as the fourth century BC.

How to make good bread

To understand how good bread is made you have to start with the wheat kernel. The most extensively cultivated grains are wheat, barley, rye, oats, rice and corn or maize. These have all been cultivated since ancient times in Europe, Asia and Africa. Maize is the only grain that originated in America.

Barley, oats and rye are the grains of the coldest regions. The cultivation of barley and oats extends even within the Arctic Circle, something I learned while I was on a farm in Finland a few years ago. Wheat needs a somewhat warmer climate.

According to the regions in which they are grown, certain types of wheat are chosen for their adaptability to altitude, climate and yield. The common wheats grown in Canada, the U.S. and Russia are spring and winter wheats, planted either in

Winter makes you want to eat better ... bread?

the spring or in the fall. The colour of the grain varies from one type to another; white wheats are mostly winter wheats, red are spring wheats.

Durham wheat is so-called because of the hardness of the grain. The Durham wheats are grown commercially in drier regions of the country, for example, the brown soil zone of the central Prairies in Canada. They are characterized by having large, ovate-shaped, amber-coloured kernels that are very hard, almost flinty in texture. This class of wheats is used extensively for pasta products throughout the world, as well as for other specialty products.

The bread wheats encompass a wide range of different types classified largely by their growth habit and functionality. The various classes are combinations of winter or spring growth habit with white or red kernels and hard or soft textured kernels. For example, both spring and winter wheats include types with hard or soft and red or white kernels. Hard wheat is often blended with soft wheat to make All-Purpose flour.



Ukrainian holiday bread. Their wheat has always been known for making the best bread.

Bread is baked from the flour of varieties with hard kernels, predominantly the red type.

They have a high protein content and high levels of predominantly two protein fractions, gliadins and glutenins. These impact elasticity to the dough during baking so that large loaves of bread can be produced.

Gluten-free breads are gaining in popularity. You'll see them on shelves in small bakeries. A gluten-free diet is the only medically accepted treatment for celiac disease. Corn, potatoes, rice, soybeans, oats, chickpeas and nut flours are all gluten-free.

In spite of its name, buckwheat is not related to wheat; pure buckwheat is considered acceptable for a gluten-free diet. However, many commercial buckwheat products are actually mixtures of wheat and buckwheat flours, and thus not acceptable.

Have a blessed Christmas! And eat good bread ... with butter! ➤

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew, Ontario farmer. His farm has 175 acres in winter wheat planted this past September that is looking very good going into the winter.

Classifieds

Birthday	Anniversary	Obituaries
<p>1931 – 2011 With deep thankfulness, we may share the good news that</p> <p>Herman Vanderburg (nee VandeBurgt) hopes to celebrate his 80th birthday on Christmas eve day December 24, 2011</p> <p>His wife, Betty, his six children, spouses and twelve grandchildren, Brothers & sisters, nieces and nephews, and friends wish him God's richest blessings. We are deeply grateful for the years of dedica- tion as teacher, principal, and counsellor in Toronto and Calgary. You are an amazingly faithful husband, father, and grandfather! We thank and praise the Lord for you!!</p> <p>Betty (nee Guillaume), your wife of 58 years Madelene Roland & Loyda Gabriel, Jessica, Chris, Anthony Ian & Sharon Arden, Mary, Cordelia Geoff & Jennifer Maxwell, Samuel, Georgia, Olivia Mark & Sarah Abbey, James Marieka & Daniel</p> <p>Address: 6320 Crowchild Tr. SW Calgary AB T3E 5R5</p>	<p>1956 December 15 2011 With thankfulness to God, we are happy to announce the 55th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents:</p> <p>TON AND TEA VAN NES (nee Zeyl)</p> <p>We are so blessed by your love – for each other, for us, and for God. Congratulations on your anniversary!</p> <p>With love, Wendy & Richard Abma, Calgary, AB Nico, Karin, Hannah, Luke, Marya Hilde & John Craig, Pitt Meadows, BC Joshua, Halaal, Nicola, Matthew, Jonathan Carol Ann & Brian Hiemstra, Thorndale, ON Benjamin, Wyatt, Axel</p> <p>Address: 35 Kingknoll Dr., King Tower Apt. 102, Brampton ON L6Y 5G5</p> <p><i>'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.'</i> Roman 15:13 NIV</p> 	<p>In God's care: on November 21, 2011, the Lord called home</p> <p>AAGJE DEGROOT (Dekker) at the age of 92 years.</p> <p>She is survived by her children, Tena and Len Van Rys of London, Ada and Rich VandenBerg of Waterloo Art and Thea DeGroot of Sarnia Nel and Bill VanGeest of Woodbridge Jack and Lydia DeGroot of Sarnia John and Cheryl DeGroot of Sarnia Betty and Tom VanEck of Grand Rapids Marlene and Greg DeGroot-Maggetti of Kitchener Paul and Brenda DeGroot of Millgrove 31 grandchildren and 34 great grandchildren.</p> <p>Predeceased by son Cor (1968), grandson Kevin Vrieze (1975) husband Jan (2002), daughter Albertena (2006), and great grandson, Jordan Gilbert (2011). Also predeceased by sister Nely and brothers Jaap, Albert and Henk. Survived by sisters Margaret Grin, Berta Dekker, Teny Brouwer, Marie DeKraker, brother Cor Dekker and son-in-law Michael Vander Weele.</p> <p>We are very thankful for her long and generous life. Born in Broek op Langedijk, The Netherlands, Dad, Mom and five children immigrated to Canada in 1952 and settled in the Sarnia area. Those early years in Canada were not easy. Putting food on the table and keeping the children warmly dressed was in itself a challenge. Mom established a pattern of inexpensive, healthy meals – kapucijners on Monday, Sunday left- overs on Tuesday, witte bonen on Wednesday, etc. She used her creativity and sewing skills to dress her children, sometimes even re-sewing larger pieces of clothing to fit smaller people. As the years passed, the family grew, until they had eleven children. Their quiver was certainly full. (Psalm 127)</p> <p>To supplement Dad's income, they began selling bunches of gladioli from the basement of their home. This grew over the years to become DeGroot's</p> <p>Nursery. The business was beside the house, so Mom would answer the phone, provide coffee for the work- ers and do the many other tasks that helped ensure a successful garden centre. Looking back, we marvel at her ability to manage everything.</p> <p>For a number of years Mom and Dad were able to enjoy some of the fruits of their labour. They would travel, and Mom especially treasured time with her many children and grandchildren. However, when Mom was in her seventies, Alzheimer's was making it difficult for them to continue. About ten years ago she moved into Faith Manor at Holland Christian Homes in Brampton. It was hard for us to see her limitations increase, and to imagine what she was going through, but we did see signs that she was at peace.</p> <p>Mom's "zorgzaamheid" (care for others) endured to the end because she knew she was loved by God. Looking back we remember that one of her favourite things was our family devotions. After breakfast she loved to read to us from her Dutch story bible. And often after dinner we would sing together – sometimes old Dutch psalms, sometimes newer faith-filled hymns. That sustained her over the years. Her care and devo- tion will continue to live in the hearts of her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.</p> <p>A memorial service of thanks and celebration for Aagje (Dekker) DeGroot's life was held on Friday, Nov. 25th at First Christian Reformed Church in Sarnia. Correspondence can be sent to: Art deGroot, 6090 Brigden Rd., Sarnia ON N7T 7H3 or to aagjememories@gmail.com</p> <p>Expressions of sympathy can be sent to a charity of your choice.</p>
Obituaries		
<p>On Tuesday, November 22, 2011, the Lord called home to eternal glory,</p> <p>GRIETJE (Margaret) VELD (nee Kok) in her 99th year at Shalom Manor in Grimsby. Beloved wife of the late Klaas Veld (1993).</p> <p>Dear mother of: Ralph & Helen Veld Ben & Elly Veld Gerrit & Rosina Veld Jane & Peter Van Duyvenvoorde Henry & Margaret Veld Margaret & Bert Kikkert</p> <p>She was also predeceased by two infant sons and a great-granddaughter.</p> <p>Dear Opoe of: 43 grandchildren, 60 great-grandchildren and 4 great-great-grandchildren.</p> <p>A celebration of Life has taken place on Saturday November 26, 2011 at 11:00 a.m. at Grace Chr. Ref. Church in Welland, Rev. Fred VanderBerg (pastor at Shalom Manor) officiating.</p> <p>We will miss her very much, but are comforted by the words of Psalm 42 which she was still able to recite with pastor Fred during a visit last week. Special thanks to all the staff at Shalom Manor for their outstanding care for our mom. Therefore, in memory of Grietje Veld, donations to Shalom Manor would be appreciated by the family.</p> <p>Correspondence address: Mr. Ralph Veld 3008 Haldimand Rd 9 RR 1 York ON N0A 1R0</p>	 <p><i>I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. John 6:47</i></p> <p>MARTEN SYTSMA</p> <p>Passed away peacefully on November 22, 2011 in his 98th year. Predeceased by his loving wife Julia (Jeltje) Sytsma (nee Swart) on September 18, 2011 in her 95th year.</p> <p>Lovingly remembered by their children, Ria & Al Zong Syd & Joanne Sytsma Thea & Clarence Smit Tina & Lloyd Dekkema Ann & (Ed)† VanHamburg Emily & David Johnston Suzanne Sytsma † Julia Pearl & Scott Urquhart Andy & Conny Sytsma JoAnn & Henry VanMeggelen 30 grandchildren, 62 great-grandchildren and 7 great-great-grandchildren</p> <p>Correspondence: Ria and Al Zong 1494 St John's Rd, Innisfil ON L9S 4N6</p>	<p>JANNA "JENNY" POSTMA</p> <p>Jenny Postma, beloved wife of Sid, went home to be with the Lord sur- rounded by family and close friends.</p> <p>Jenny was born March 19, 1938 in VisVliet, Holland and was the third oldest of seven children. Jenny and Sid married October 28, 1957 in Holland and shortly after immigrated to Red Deer, AB.</p> <p>She will be lovingly cherished by her husband of 54 years Sid and her children</p> <p>Shirley (Willy) Ypma, (Chilliwack, BC) John (Janet) Postma, (Red Deer, AB) Anita (Allan) Andersen (Red Deer, AB) Mary Jane (George) Buzak, (Edmonton, AB) Andy (Linda) Postma, (Camrose, AB) 18 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren.</p> <p>Correspondence can be sent to: 3919 – 56 Ave Red Deer AB T4N 4P4</p>
 <p><i>For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...</i></p> <p>May you have a blessed Christmas.</p> <p>From Holland Christian Homes 7900 McLaughlin Rd. S, Brampton, ON www.hch.ca</p>		<p>Vacation</p> <p>Ft. Myers Florida Pool Home for Rent – 2 Bed, 2 Bath, Sleeps 10, Heated Pool, Hot Tub, Bikes, Quiet Cul-de-sac, 9 mi. to Beach. Photos Available. Phone 905-332-6711</p> <p>Holiday accomodation in Holland with vehicle rentals and tours. www.chestnutlane.nl</p> 
<p>From all the residents of Shalom Manor and Shalom Gardens, we wish you a Blessed Christmas and a Joyous New Year!</p> <p>Shalom Manor & Shalom Gardens Apartments 12 Bartlett Ave., Grimsby, ON L3M 4N5</p> 		
<p><i>The staff and board of Christian Courier wish our readers all the blessings of peace – reconciliation with God and with one another – this season and throughout the coming year.</i></p>		

Classifieds



Juned

Giving gifts of ability

Stouffville, ON, November 30, 2011 – Born in India with bilateral clubfoot, four-year-old Juned's feet were so badly twisted he couldn't wear shoes. Walking became extremely painful; Juned could only sit on the sidelines, and watch his friends play.

Thanks to the generosity of Canadians, Juned has benefitted from some of the 33 extraordinary gift items featured in cbm Canada's "GiveJoy" Christmas catalogue, helping him to live a fuller life.

cbm's catalogue is full of gifts that give ability – walking, seeing, hearing, learning, growing and speaking – these gifts literally change lives! cbm provides medical aid, rehabilitation and practical education – for children just like Juned.

Through cbm, Juned has received plaster casts, shoes, and splints his mother couldn't afford – to straighten his twisted, bent feet. A community support worker regularly gave Juned vital rehabilitation exercises. And as Juned's feet grew strong and straight, cbm provided special educational toys to stimulate his mind.

Reshraf, Juned's mother, recalls his progress after cbm's intervention. "He started to walk more. But he also smiled more."

Today Juned confidently goes outside to play with his friends – no longer limited by pain or twisted feet.

cbm's GiveJoy catalogue also offers gifts that prevent disabilities, like mosquito nets which protect children and their families from malaria; and rainwater harvesting systems for schools to give children clean, safe water that protects them from diseases.

With each gift you give from cbm's catalogue, you receive a JOYful matching gift card or gift tag that you can keep or pass along to a friend or loved one – someone you're honouring with your gift.

More than 500 million people worldwide are trapped in poverty with disabilities. Canadians have an opportunity to help break the cycle of poverty and disability by giving a JOYful gift – visit www.givejoy.ca or call cbm Canada at 1-800-567-2264.

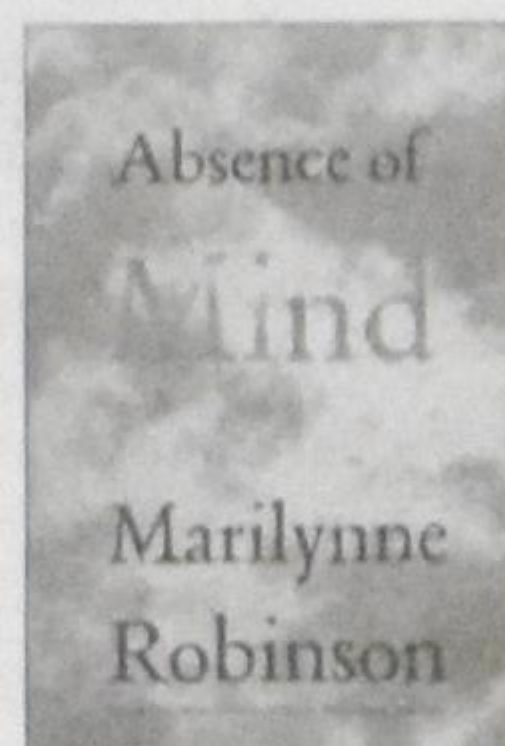
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Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self

by Marilynne Robinson



In this ambitious book, acclaimed writer Marilynne Robinson applies her astute intellect to some of the most vexing topics in the history of human thought – science, religion, and consciousness. Crafted with the same care and insight as her award-winning novels, *Absence of Mind* challenges postmodern atheists who crusade against religion under the banner of science. Through keen interpretations of language, emotion, science, and poetry, *Absence of Mind* restores human consciousness to its central place in the religion-science debate.

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Ottawa Christian Reformed Campus Chaplaincy seeks to hire a full-time campus chaplain

to establish a new campus ministry on the bilingual campus of the University of Ottawa in Ottawa, Ontario.

The successful candidate is committed to the Reformed faith, self-motivated, has advanced academic and/or professional degrees; has experience working pastorally with young adults; relates well to religious and ethnically diverse groups on and around campus; can nurture healthy relationships with volunteer campus ministry workers from other denominations and faiths; and, is able to be an incarnational presence in both the academic and wider communities. Preference will be given to candidates who are bilingual (French/English).

Interested applicants should send a letter of application, resume, the names and contact information for three references, and a brief vision for campus ministry to

Prof. Larry Vandergrift, Chair of the Search Committee,
937 Alpine Ave., Ottawa, ON Canada, K2B 5R9.

A job description is available upon request. For more information please contact: lvdrift@uottawa.ca. Deadline for applications is December 31, 2011.



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DURHAM CHRISTIAN HOMES is looking for a full-time Chaplain with Christ-like compassion and love needed to serve in two nursing homes located in Bowmanville, Ontario. The chaplain will be expected to provide spiritual leadership in the homes, offering support for family, residents and staff as well as leading interdenominational services and groups. Qualifications include: MDiv, 2 units (or more) of Clinical Pastoral Education (or equivalent) and a minimum of 5 years chaplaincy experience. For a more detailed description, visit us at www.dchomes.ca.

Please send inquiries and resumes to careers@dchomes.ca or mail Attn: Human Resources, 200 Glen Hill Drive South, Whitby, ON, L1N 9W2. The deadline for submission is Friday, December 30, 2011. Only those selected for an interview will be contacted. No phone calls please.

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For further information, or to submit a pastoral profile please email admin@wfcrc.ca

The Christian Reformed Church
in North America is seeking a new

Director

of Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI). **Back to God** Ministries International fulfills a vital role in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world using various media that effectively communicate Christ in the "language of the heart" of the viewers and listeners.

The Director will give leadership in the strategic planning process and execution of policies that support the mission of BTGMI and the Christian Reformed Church. They will be able to articulate the vision and mission for developing worldwide partnerships.

The successful candidate will have demonstrated skills in casting vision, thinking strategically, have experience working in a leadership capacity, working in a global context and be an ordained minister of the Word in the CRC.

Visit the web site at www.crcna.org for a complete job description and additional information about BTGMI. To apply send cover letter and resume to btgmisearch@crcna.org by February 15, 2012. The process will remain open until a nominee to fill the position is identified.



Principal/COO

Thunder Bay Christian School

Thunder Bay Christian School, situated in scenic Northwestern Ontario, is seeking applications for a full-time Principal. The City of Thunder Bay, with a population of over 122,000 people, is located on the north shore of Lake Superior and surrounded by the beauty of mountains, lakes, and forests which allow for a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities. Thunder Bay Christian School currently has 104 students from JK to Grade 10 and will be celebrating their 50th anniversary in the fall of 2012. Information about TBCS is available at www.tbaychristianschool.ca.

The new Principal will be required to provide leadership and direction as the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the school. This means that the ideal candidate must have strong leadership, communication, educational and organizational skills. He or she must be able to use these skills to successfully revitalize, evaluate, and encourage an experienced staff to work as a team with the unified purpose of instructing students to grow spiritually and academically. The successful candidate will have a sincere and active faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and be committed to a reformed Christian world view. Some classroom teaching will also be required. Preference will be given to candidates who hold or are progressing towards a Christian School Principal Certificate.

Interested applicants should forward a cover letter, resume, statement of faith and a statement of their philosophy of Christian education which includes their vision for Christian educational leadership.

Please send this by e-mail to agysen.tbcs@gmail.com or by mail to Angela Gysen, TBCS Principal Search Committee, R.R. #2, Site 12-36, Thunder Bay, ON, P7C 4V1.

The deadline for applications is January 9, 2012. Contract begins August 1, 2012.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Jan 15 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Veenstra will be preaching. DVDs are available.

Feb 17-19 Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend. St. Catharines, ON Register at reformedme.org

Feb 18-20 Ottewell CRC, Edmonton, AB, will DV celebrate 50 years of God's grace and faithfulness. For more information visit: ottewell@telusplanet.net.

Apr 20 -22 Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend. London, ON Register at reformedme.org

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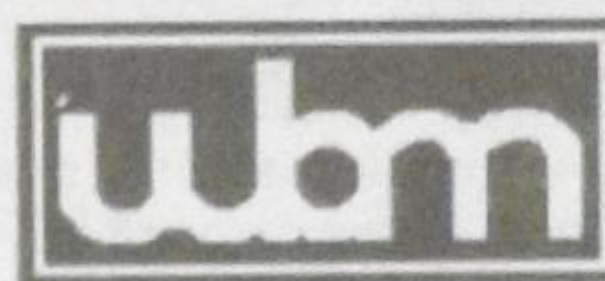
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Events

Goats for Christmas? You're kidding...

Keith Knight

What do you do when you receive a couple of goats as a Christmas gift?

For two widows in West Bengal, India, it completely changed their lives. Those goats also become an integral part of the family.

Janya Prachi and Kashvi Shanti are recent widows. Without the income and status that their husbands had provided them, they struggled to pay the bills. They each live with their children, so there are many mouths in their households to feed.

As is typical in many Asian cultures, after they lost their husbands they also lost the respect of their fellow villagers. They could only get backbreaking manual labour jobs with meagre wages.

Janya and Kashvi had come to know the Lord through the witness of Gospel for Asia supported missionary Punit Bir and they faithfully attended his church. Ignoring cultural norms, the missionary and believers helped the widows as much as possible. Then last December, Punit received several pairs of goats that has been purchased in Canada through the Gospel for Asia Christmas Gift Catalogue to distribute to needy families in his church.

Punit immediately thought of Janya and Kashvi. With a pair of goats, a poor family in Asia can nourish their children with the vitamin-rich milk and sell the excess milk for income.

The missionary presented each widow with a male and a female goat. When Janya and Kashvi

took their new goats home, they began meticulously tending to them. "These ladies take such good care of their goats," a GFA correspondent said.

"It's obvious that they don't treat them like goats; they treat them like family members!" And one of the goats is now expecting a kid, so they'll soon have even more resources!

The widows are incredibly thankful for how the Lord has provided for them in their time of great need. And they're not the only ones who were blessed. Punit was able to give several others families goats, too. The goats are much cheaper to take care of than larger farm animals – like cows – so they are not a financial drain on the poverty-stricken families. And their milk can be used to drink or turned into butter and cheese. Some goats can also be sheared to make wool.

Gospel for Asia provides goats and other livestock to hundreds of *Dalits* ("Untouchables") and other low caste families each Christmas. Through these gifts of hope their lives are completely transformed. For further information, check www.gfa.org/gift.

Keith Knight is executive director of Canadian Christian Businessmen Federation (CCBF).



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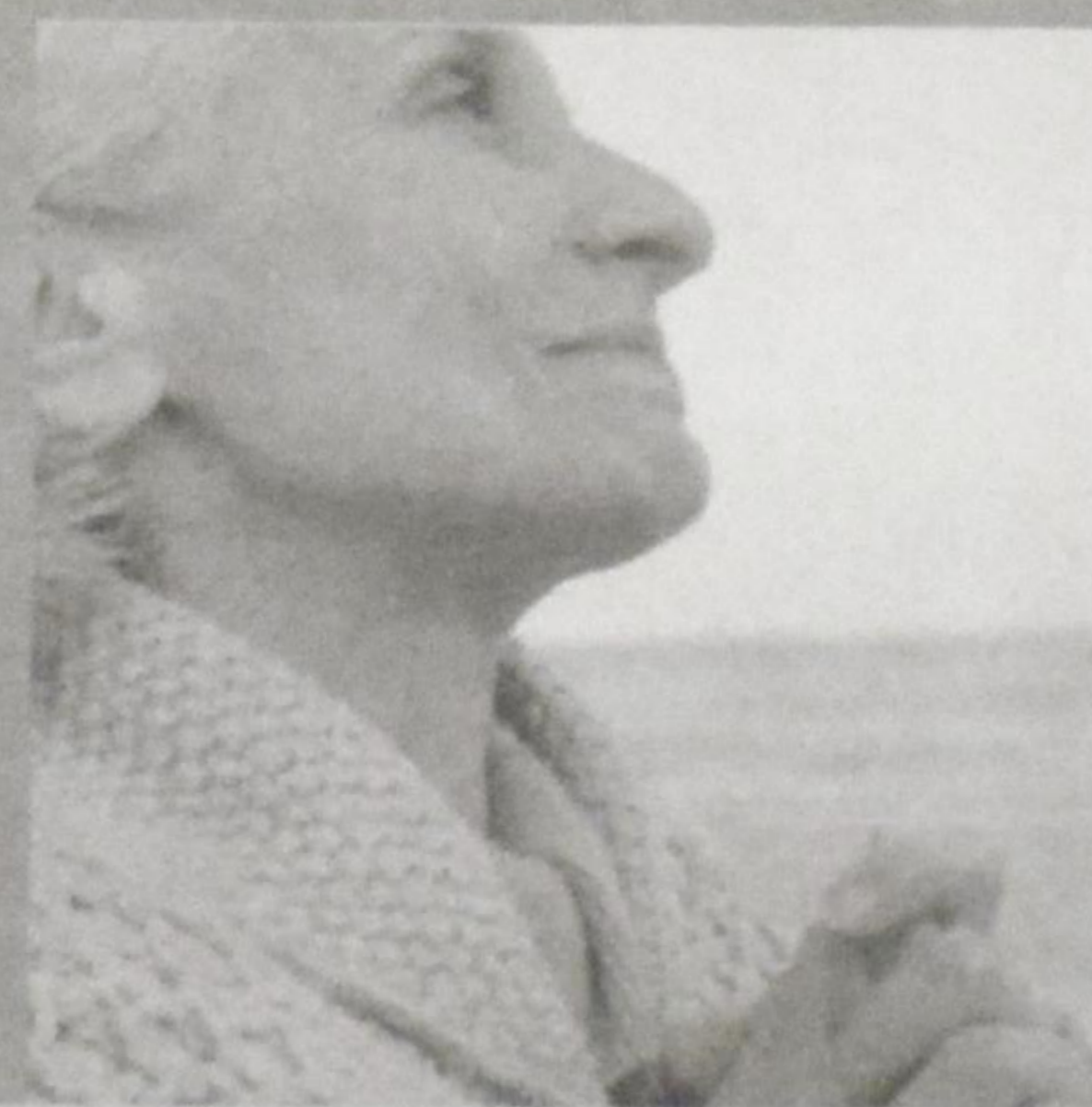
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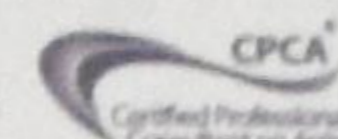
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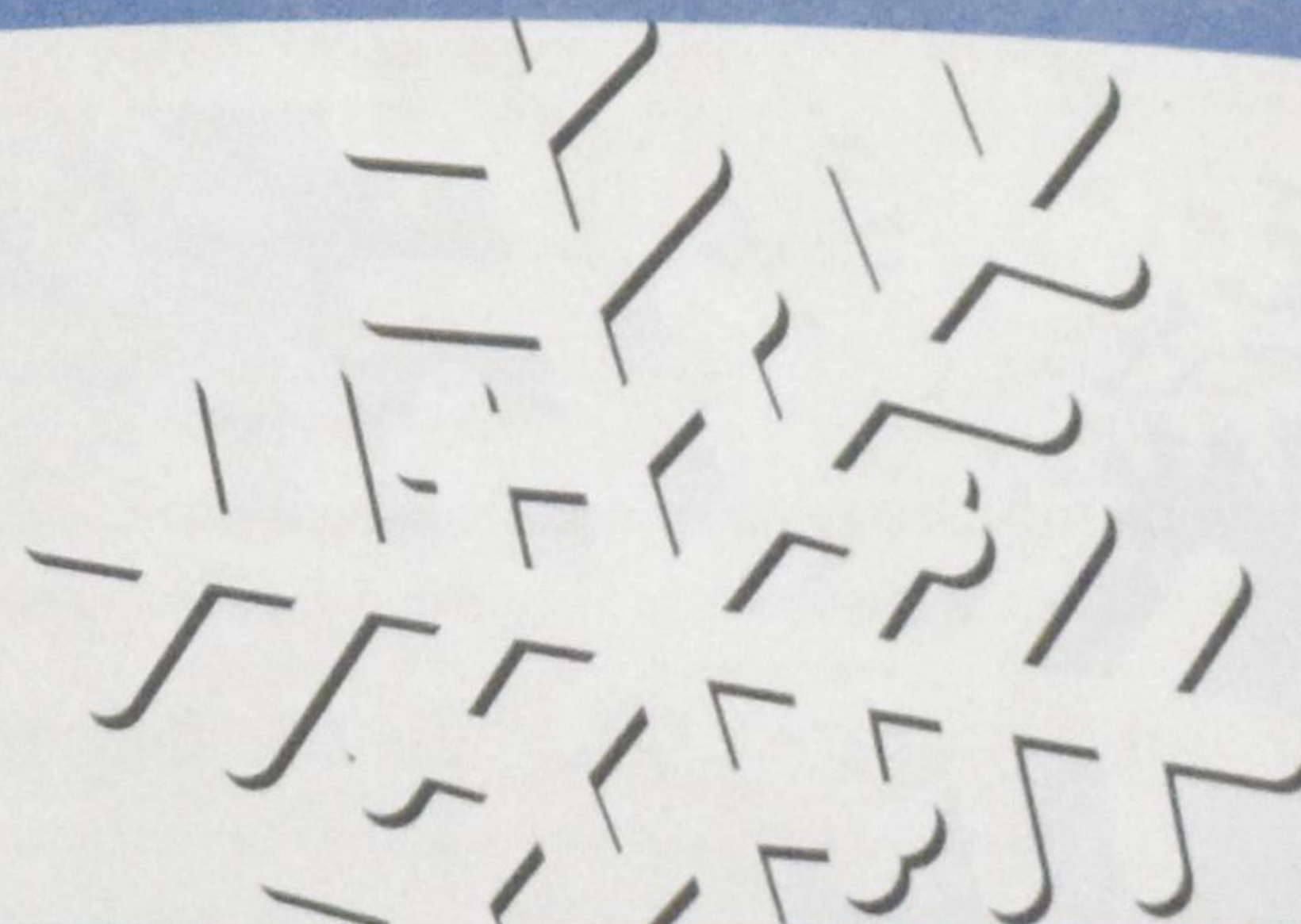
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